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HISTORY OF ART

MEDIÆVAL ART

HISTORY OF ART

By Elie Faure

ANCIENT ART

MEDIÆVAL ART

RENAISSANCE ART

MODERN ART

THE SPIRIT OF THE FORMS

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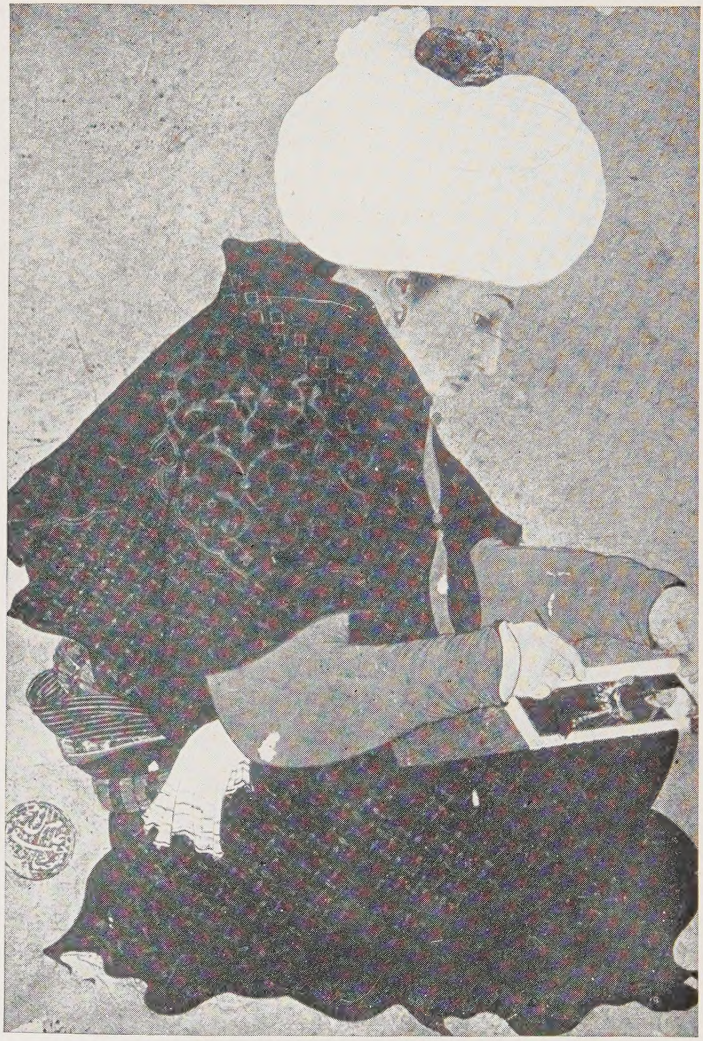

BEHZADE (Persia). Man painting.
(*From Les Miniatures Persanes.*)

ELIE FAURE

HISTORY OF ART

MEDIAEVAL ART

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY WALTER PACH

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HISTORY OF ART—
MEDIÆVAL ART

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To

My Friends of the Université Populaire

"La Fraternelle"

1905-1909

KHMER ART. Ornament of a pilaster. (*Angkor.*)

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THE ENTOMBMENT OF THE VIRGIN (*Cathedral of Senlis*)

INTRODUCTION

WHILE the distant civilization of China delays the hour of its death by turning to its past, while India, to assuage its fever, spreads a religion across Asia, the shadows deepen, little by little, over the shores on which was passed the brilliant and virile youth of the western world. From the beginning of history, the ocean of the peoples ebbs and flows from the plateau of Iran to the fresh and healthful lands that face the Atlantic. On the plains of northern Europe silent invasions have accumulated reserves of men who will renew the innocence of the southern peoples when a too enervating contact with Asia shall weaken their faith in their own intelligence. We have seen the Phœnicians bring to Greece and to Italy, together with the science and the ideals of Chaldea and Egypt, the echo from India of the mystic intoxications through which the religious thrill of universal life entered the order of the Occident. We have seen Greece, in the train of Alex-

ander, transmitting its spark of inspiration to the troubled and tired soul of India. Rome, in its turn, is to feel the sensualism of Asia when it brings peace to that land. . . . The movement was exhausting its rhythm little by little. A long repose had to follow the expenditure of energy from which the future of the world had come forth; human nature had to retire into itself to allow its overstrained mind and its perverted senses to forget their conquests and to renew the desire to get back to their natural sources.

From the day when the unity of the Greek soul begins to disintegrate, when two currents appear in the thought of the philosophers and the sensibility of the artists, when Plato and Praxiteles oppose spiritual life to the materialism of Lysippus and Aristotle, from that day the youth of mankind ceased to enchant the world. Their antagonistic tendencies —rationalism that halts the movement of instinct, and sensualism that unseats the will—both lead to the negation of effort. And the skeptic and the mystic open the road to the apostles who come to sow, in the anxious heart of the multitudes, remorse at having lived too fully and an eager desire to purge themselves of the impurity of the body by such an exaltation of the soul that a thousand years will be required by the peoples of the Occident to recover their dignity in a new equilibrium.

It was by the spiritual fusion of metaphysics and morality, by the projection beyond ourselves—who are wicked and corrupt —of an absolute which makes it our duty to repent having been born, that monotheism without compromise was formulated for the first time in the doctrine of the Hebrew prophets. God was outside of the world henceforward, man could no longer attain Him save beyond the confines of his own life. This unity of the divine, which was asserted by the theologians, implanted in our nature that terrible

dualism which was doubtless an indispensable trial for all of us, and which still remains so. It was this dualism that caused us to wander for long centuries in search of ourselves. It kept alive for a thousand years, in the depths of our minds, the painful conflict between the solicitations of the senses and the haunting idea of salvation. But it is perhaps, thanks to this dualism again, that we know that our strength lies in the harmony, which we seek in suffering and realize in joy, between our animality -which is sacred —and our reason—which is sacred.

The most expressive and highest manifestation of that harmony — art, the living form which sprang from the marriage of matter and mind to affirm their unity -art had to die at the same time that the nature-creeds died, when the ethical religions appeared, denying its usefulness and precipitating humanity upon paths the reverse of those it had trod up to that time. First, the Jews, who brought into Occidental thought the imposing and sterile spirit of the solitudes, hated and condemned form. The Arabs, born of the same stock, were also to manifest their disdain for it. To change all this there was needed the contact with the soil of Europe, with its bays, its mountains, its fertile plains, its vivifying air, its variety of appearances, and its problems. And it was only after ten centuries of painful struggle, of efforts forever defeated and forever renewed, that the peoples of Europe tore themselves from the powerful embrace of the Semitic idea. It was necessary that India should feel in the very substance of the Buddhistic idea, vibrant within it and creating its strength and its compelling beauty, the incessant action of fecundity and death which causes its forests and rivers to move, in order that it should repeople the temples with its hundred thousand living gods.

After the pantheism of Vedic India and the polytheism of Æschylean Greece had attained their highest expression, and their decline had commenced, there appeared, in the depths of the great moral religions which began to claim dominion over the world, the same despairing sentiment of the final uselessness of action. Man everywhere was fatigued by living, by thinking, and he deified his fatigue as, when he loved action, he had deified his courage. The resignation of the Christian, the belief in Nirvana of the Buddhist, the fatalism of the Arab, and the traditionalism of the Chinese are born of the same pessimistic need for avoiding effort. For some centuries the Arabs escaped the consequences of this discouraging idea, but only because the sole effort demanded from them by the Prophet was an outward effort, satisfying the essential needs of their nomadic and conquering life, and because repose was promised them in death itself, to which they hurled themselves in the charge of their cavalry, leaving to the vanquished peoples the task of working for them. The Chinese, again, escape only through their absence of idealism and their positive spirit whose energy is employed, precisely, to fetter and retard action. But the generalizing peoples of the Occident, the sensual peoples of India, could extricate themselves from these consequences only if they profited by the repose that the doctrines themselves imposed on them. And so they drove the roots of their instinct deeper into their earth and fought with all their rejuvenated power against the spirit of renunciation to which the disciples of Sakyamuni and of Jesus had dragged the crowds whose interest it was to listen to them while they hid the faces of the two men who were all love and therefore all action.

Now that the ethical religions are a part of history, now that we have learned that the moral need loses its

power when it presumes to annihilate or diminish the æsthetic need of which it is only one aspect, we are sufficiently strong to recognize that Christianity and Buddhism introduced into the world an admirable element of passion. In India, Buddhism had never really assumed the character of radical opposition to Brahmanism that Christianity adopted toward the pagan religions. It was not the spirit of one soil and one race going forth to combat the spirit of another soil and another race. It was born of the very current that urged the peoples of India to mingle their soul with the voices of the universe, and to beseech the voices of the universe to permeate that soul incessantly; it was an extension in the moral world of the formidable sensualism whose appeal men could not ignore when that sensualism fused their mind with the mind of the wild beasts, the forests, the waters, and the stones. In the Occident, on the contrary, in the bosom of Christianity, organized into a political system, the invasion of the human soul by the forces of nature could take on no other aspect than that of rebellion. And therein we have the reason why the Christian soul has stamped a profound imprint on the form of our mind.

By teaching the hatred of life, Christianity multiplied our very power to live when the fatalities of economic and political evolution in Occidental society brought them into contact with life, adapted their organs to new functions, and assured new satisfactions to their needs. Our senses had kept silence for a thousand years; for a thousand years the sap of humanity had been turned back to our hearts; for a thousand years the mind had accumulated, in a frightful solitude, a world of confused desires, of unexpressed intuitions, of fevers only partly allayed, which caused the love of the world to burst forth from the mind when it could be restrained no longer, and then it appeared with all

the intoxication of the beasts of the forests when released from cages. There is no more magnificent spectacle in history than that of humanity, in its religious frenzy, hurling itself on form to make it fruitful again.

It is in this spectacle that we must seek for the origin of the differences that are noticeable when we consider in their ensemble the manifestations of ancient art and mediæval art, especially in India and in western Europe. The ancient world had never forbidden the love of form; it had, on the contrary, arrived through form—by a progressive, harmonious, continuous effort—at the philosophic generalizations formulated by the sculptors of Athens toward the middle of the century of Æschylus, of Sophocles, and of Phidias. Egypt, confined by the theocracy within the metaphysical limits from which it was forbidden to go onward, had studied man in his structure and had defined for all time the form of the shadow that he will cast on the earth so long as the sun shall shine upon him. Greece, freed from dogma, had scrutinized the relations that unite man with nature, had found again in the volumes and gestures of living forms, the laws which determine harmony, in the revolution of the heavenly bodies, in the unfurling of the profiles of the earth, in the rising and falling motion of the seas. It rested with the Middle Ages of the Occident to render in form the relationships created between man and man by the griefs that have been lived through together, by the hopes too long deferred, by the joy of the senses liberated after centuries of asceticism and of physical and moral compression. The new spirit manifests itself everywhere by a wild eruption of reveling in matter that establishes an obscure and magical understanding between mediæval Europe and mediæval India. Brahman India felt living within itself the soul of Buddha as Gothic Europe, carried along by its social needs,

felt living again within itself—despite the theologians, the councils, and the fathers of the Church—the loving soul, the pitiful, artist soul of Jesus.

The reawakening of the sensuality of men took on many forms. Among the Christians it had a revolutionary appearance; among the Indians it found its nutriment as well in the moral passion of Sakyamuni as in the pantheist fever of Brahma; it manifested itself against the very spirituality of Islam in the thrust of Berber mosques, in their embroidery of metal and of wood, and in the shimmer of jewels in Persian painting; it attempted a painful escape from the clasp of the fearful nightmare of the Aztecs, bringing together again the strips of flesh that were cut up before men's eyes; it appears in the patience of the Chinese, who, through the language of form, render the entities of their moral equilibrium fit for daily life. But everywhere in the Middle Ages, and whatever the aspect of the revival, the peoples were ignorant of the real object they were pursuing; everywhere their conquest of the life of the universe was accomplished under the pretext of religion, always with the support of the letter of the dogma, always against its spirit. It is this which emphasizes so powerfully, in the art of the Middle Ages, its confused liberty, its drunken and fecund plunge into the fields of sensation, its carelessness as to spoken language—provided that language expressed something, its disordered mixture of feelings springing from the contact of the soul with the world, in the naked strength of instinct. The philosophic idea, which compels all ancient art to seek harmony of form, is rendered useless here by the anchor of dogma, which, outside itself, leaves the rejuvenated and unfettered senses free to seek their realization and permits the love, that is universal at the moment, to release itself from the control of the human will. The admirable

logic of the French cathedral builders of the Middle Ages is primarily applied to realizing a practical object, and if the Arab raises over the desert the abstract image of the mind, it is with roses and with women that he fills his cool Alhambras. Immortal Dionysus has reconquered the earth, mingling with his sensual fever the love of Buddha, the gentleness of Jesus, and the dignity of Mohammed; and when Prometheus, through the commune of the Occident, is reborn at his side, Prometheus is unconscious of himself: he also is flooded with mystic intoxication. The Middle Ages have recreated consciousness despite the gods that they adored.

It is always against the gods that the consciousness of mortals is created, even when these gods, as those of the Greek Olympus, express laws that are to be understood in order that they may be obeyed. An inevitable confusion has arisen in us, between the pretext for our beliefs and their real meaning. From the beginning of things we have seen art and religion following the same road, art being willing to move almost exclusively between the dikes of religious symbolism and changing its appearance as soon as one god replaces another. We have never asked ourselves why all the religions, even when they combat one another, express themselves in forms that constantly survive them and that time eventually finds to be in accord as well as a necessity. We have never asked ourselves why the finest creations of the artists do not always coincide with the moments of most intense religious exaltation, why the same religion often remains silent throughout its youth and expresses itself only when it approaches its decline. We have never asked ourselves why the French image makers imprinted their desires on the stones of the cathedrals only after the movement of revolt which assured the

life of the commune against the oppression of the priest and the lord, why the signs of discouragement appeared among them precisely during the course of one century, the fifteenth, when the Catholic faith knew its moment of the most ardent fever and excitement. We have never asked ourselves why India mingled its contradictory gods in the same explosion of sensual intoxication; why Islam—which has preserved to our own day the uncompromising fanaticism of ten centuries ago—lets its mosques fall to ruin and builds no others; why the Chinese artist sometimes belongs to three or four different sects, whereas the Japanese artist almost always gives the impression of belonging to none; why the European raised altars to a God of mercy at the hour when the Aztec caused his altars to run with the blood of human victims. We have never asked ourselves whether the peoples did not give to their beliefs the form of their sensations.

We must, however, in our hours of virility, have as imperious a need of artistic creation as of food and love. This need sweeps our beliefs along in its triumphal movement, for there is creation even among those peoples whose theologians and philosophers teach the final nullity of effort; their own poets sing the vanity of our activity in terms that create life. Christianity is pessimistic, Islamism is pessimistic, pantheism is pessimistic. What matter? The Christian causes a sonorous forest of vaults, of windows, of towers to spring from the soil; the Mussulman spreads the cool shadow of his cupolas over his incurable inertia; the Indian disembowels the mountains to make them fruitful. Man wants to live, and he demands of those who sing and carve to show him the way of the true life, even when they speak to him of death. It is the people that makes its gods, whichever they may be.

To be sure, we need a faith. It is only in faith that

we gather the strength necessary to resist our disillusionments and to maintain before our eyes the image of our hope. But this faith, which we decorate with new labels when a new system of metaphysics or of morality imposes itself on our needs—this faith changes only its aspect, it does not change in spirit; and as long as it lives in us, whatever the period in which our activity takes place, whichever the religion that serves it as a pretext, the forms of art, even the most diverse, will do no more than express the faith. It is simply the confidence that comes after long slumbers, and that grows weak upon a too prolonged contact with the mystery which our ardor for life urges us to penetrate. When a religion arrives at its most harmonious and expressive degree of development, this faith is not thereby awakened; on the contrary, the religion is born of the faith, it is the projection, into the field of our illusions, of the inner realities which guide and exalt us. When man is near to self-realization, he accepts, all at once and in the mass, a great simple synthesis of everything he is ignorant of, so as not to be troubled by doubt and anxiety in his search for what he wants to know. When he has learned too much, when his faith in himself weakens, his outward beliefs may last or even become exaggerated, but at the same time all the expressions of his thought vacillate. Peoples in action force any religion to bend itself to the manifestations of their original virtues. A religion models a people to its dogmas only when that people no longer believes in itself. Whatever our paradise, we realize it on earth when we have achieved self-confidence. To declare this paradise divine, we wait for centuries and search the world until the hour comes when life mounts fully in our heart, and the word "faith" is the religious name we give to energy.

Never before had this energy arisen in the world in

such a violent eruption of intoxicated mysticism. It is this that causes really religious minds, from the moment they cross the threshold of the cathedral, the mosque, or the pagoda, to forget profoundly and completely the rite that is celebrated in the place; it is this that causes them to be absolutely indifferent to the dogmas on which these temples were built; hence, too, their exaltation over the arrested and dead forms of man's religion and over the dead forms in the unlimited field of his relations with his fellow-man. The word "mystic" is still to be defined. If mysticism is that form of despair which urges the human soul, in moments of lassitude, toward external gods in whose hands it abdicates all will and desire, toward gardens which open to the dead alone and offer them flowers that smell of corpses, then the first periods of Christianity were perhaps the only ones to know this mysticism, for at that time a minimum of humanity subsisted in the multitude of superstitions and religious practices. But if mysticism appears under that form of frantic and living hope that hurls itself on the rich fields of sensation and action and gathers into its flesh all the invading forces of renewal and exaltation which the approving world pours into it simultaneously, then it is the creative spirit itself, and its accord with its flesh reveals to it the necessary means. Whatever god he adores, or even if he rejects all the gods, the man who desires to create cannot express himself if he does not feel in his veins the flow of all the rivers—even those which carry along sand and putrefaction, he is not realizing his entire being if he does not see the light of all the constellations, even those which no longer shine, if the primeval fire, even when locked in beneath the crust of the earth, does not consume his nerves, if the hearts of all men, even the dead, even those still to be born, do not beat in his heart, if abstrac-

tion does not mount from his senses to his soul to raise it to the plane of the laws which cause men to act, the rivers to flow, the fire to burn, and the constellations to revolve.

And everywhere, or practically everywhere, in the Middle Ages, the creators had these hours of confused and limitless communion with the heart and mind of matter in movement. And what is admirable about these men is that none or almost none of them has left us his name. Therein lies a phenomenon, indeed, that is perhaps unique in history—the very masses of the people contributing their strength to the life whose tide flowed in them incessantly; it is a passionate abandonment by the multitudes to the blind impulse of their regenerated instincts. Antiquity—or Greek antiquity, at least—had not known this hour, because she had achieved her conquests in a progressive effort. Here the peoples recovered, at a single bound, the lost contact with the world; and as the conquests of their past still lived, though unknown to them, in the potential power that dwelt in them, the return to action took place in a prodigious tumult. These multitudes built their temples themselves; the beating of some obscure heart sealed every stone in its place. Never has there been such a spurting forth of vaults, pyramids, belfries, and towers, such a tide of statues rising from the soil like plants to invade space and capture heaven. From the Dutch Indies and from the Himalayas to the Atlantic, from the Atlas to the North Sea, from the Peruvian Andes to the Gulf of Mexico, a swift current of irresistible love passed through space to weld the worlds that were ignorant of each other. Architecture, the anonymous and collective art, the plastic hymn of the crowds in action, issued from them with so deep a murmur, in such a transport of intoxication, that it seemed the voice of the universal hope, the same

among all the peoples of the earth, seeking in their substance the gods who were concealed from their eyes. When they had seen the face of these gods, the builders of the temples stopped, but with such a gesture of despair that it broke the iron armor within which the theocracies were walling in the intelligence, and decided the individual to make the conquest of himself.

MEDIÆVAL ART

. . . the voices seemed all
to form the same song, so perfect was their accord.
DANTE ALIGHIERI

Mont-Abou

Chapter I. INDIA

I

AT the hour when the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean were writing the first page of history, India was also beginning to live a superior moral life. But only the murmur of the Vedic hymns, more ancient by a thousand or two thousand years, perhaps, than the epics of Greece, arises from the confusion of the past. Not a single poem of stone, save a few megalithic monuments whose antiquity is not known, exists to unveil the mystery of the Indian soul before the Middle Ages of the Occident, and it seems nearer to this period than to the ancient civilizations.

It is because the tribes of Iran, when they had left the high plateaus to descend the lengths of the rivers toward the horizon of the great plains, did not find

everywhere the same soil, the same trees, the same waters, the same skies. Some of them had to face the unity of the desert, the source of the metaphysical absolutes. Others peopled the countries of moderate size, with scattered vegetation and clear-cut forms, which led them to observe objectively, and brought about the desire to complete in their minds the balanced forces that make up the harmonious universe. The Iranians who had followed the valley of the Ganges had first to give way to the intoxication of the senses. Still keeping within them the silence and the coolness of the high country, they plunged without transition into a world that overwhelmed them with its ardor and fecundity.

Never, in any part of the globe, had man found himself in the presence of an aspect of nature at once so generous and so fierce. Death and life impose themselves there with such violence that he was forced to endure them no matter what their form. To escape the dead seasons, to reach the seasons of fertility, it was enough for him to move northward or southward. Nourishing vegetation, roots, fruit, and grain sprouted from a soil that does not exhaust itself. He held out his hand and gathered up life. When he entered the woods to draw water from the great rivers or to seek materials for his house, death rose up irresistibly, carried along by the waves, as with the crocodile, hidden in the thickets, as with the tiger, writhing under the grasses with the cobra, or breaking down the rampart of trees with the step of the elephant. Scarcely, if at all, in the nocturnal tangle of tree stems, the branches, and the leaves, could he distinguish the movement of animal life from the movement of rotting matter and the flowering of herbs. Born of the hidden fermentations in which life and death fuse, the torrent of sap which feeds our universe burst from the luxuri-

ant body of the earth in healthful fruits and poisonous flowers.

The mingling aspects of generosity and cruelty that nature offered to man disarmed him mentally and

Sanchi (iii Century B.C.). A gate of the Stupa.

physically. The possibility of attaining a moral ideal, to be reached only through the conquest of tremendous forests and multiplied temptations, seemed to him as inaccessible as the brow of the Himalayas which lifted the highest glaciers of the earth into the blue light of

the north. Accepting life and death with the same indifference, he had to do no more than lay open his senses to the penetration of the universe and permit the gradual rise from his instincts to his soul of that grandiose, confused pantheism which is the whole of

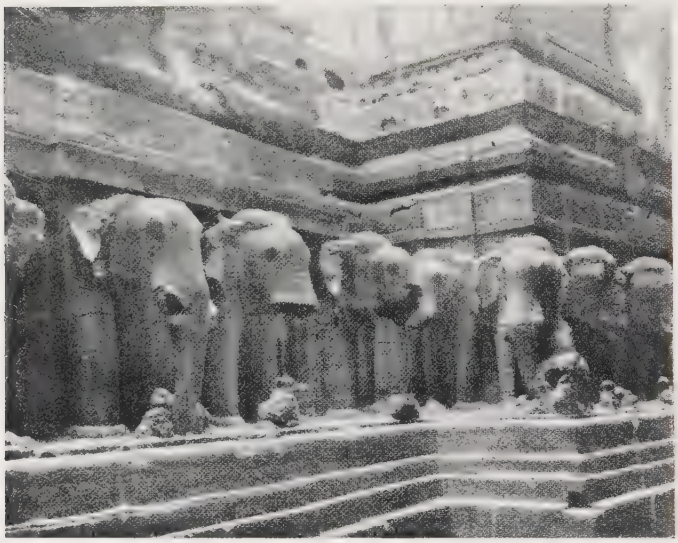
KARLI (II Century B.C.). Bas-relief of the Chaitya.

the science, the religion, and the philosophy of the man of India.

And yet, when Alexander reached the banks of the Indus, a great social revolution was shaking the peninsula. A century before, Sakyamuni, the Buddha, had felt the flood of pantheist intoxication in his inner life, had felt it invaded by a love whose power swept him on like a river. He loved men, he loved beasts, he loved the trees, the stones — everything that

INDO-HELLENISTIC ART. Buddha. (1 Century B.C.). (*Private Collection.*)

breathed, that throbbed, that moved; everything, even, whose form could be grasped by the senses, from the constellations of heaven to the grass on which one trod. Since the world is but a single body, it must be that an irresistible tenderness draws together all the dispersed elements, all the different forms which



Ellora (vi Century). Basement of the Elephants.

wander through the world. Hunger, killing, suffering, all are love. Sakyamuni tenderly offered his bare flesh to an eagle that was pursuing a dove.

Whatever the fatalism and the sensualism of a people, it always listens, at least once during the course of history, to him who comes to pour the balm of love upon its wounds. The tiger could not be conquered, it is true, the peak of the Himalayas could not be reached, and the sacred rivers that descended from

Ellora (v Century). Monolithic temple, detail from the life of Vishnu.

it could not cease to roll fever and life in their waters. And yet the social machinery of the Brahman, the implacable régime of castes which reflected from top to bottom the relentless rigor of the energy of the universe, was shattered by the revolt of love. Half a century after the incursion of Alexander, the emperor Asoka was forced to follow the lead of the multitudes and erect eighty-four thousand temples in commemoration of a man who had never spoken of the gods.

How long did Buddhism last in India? Seven or eight centuries, perhaps—an hour of the life of these multitudes whose history, as it evolves in the past and in the future, seems as infinite and as confused as their swarming in space. India returned, insensibly, to the Vedic gods; the Brahman, supported by the prince, rebuilt the social pyramid and swept from the earth man's hope of paradise. Buddhism took refuge in the soul of a few cenobites and, beyond the frontiers of India, was to conquer Asia. Thus Christianity, born of the Semitic ideal, was to conquer the whole Occident, save the Hebrews. A revolution does not vanquish the fundamental instinct of the surroundings that provoke it.

It was from the depths of the Indian nature itself that the materialistic mysticism had risen again to stifle all the desires for humanity aroused by Buddhism. The temples with which the crowds of neophytes had sown the soil of India brought them, stone by stone, to submit anew to the ritualization of the primitive beliefs, which did not cease to be source of their emotions. The Buddhistic monument, properly so called, has almost disappeared from India. The *topes*, the great reliquaries of brick, are perhaps the only edifices not dedicated to a god having a material figure. And yet the history of Buddha, the whole of his life as it was passed among the animals and the

forests, is sculptured on the door. The *chaityas*, the basilicas that were built about the first century, already have capitals composed of animal figures. When Sakyamuni himself appears in the sanctuary, his teaching is forgotten and an instinctive sensualism overcomes the moral needs.

What did it matter to the crowds of India? They needed forms to love. The Brahmans had no diffi-

Bhuwaneswar (vi Century). The great temple.

culty in conquering. Were they even conscious of their victory, and did the miserable multitude feel the defeat weighing upon its hope? Was there a victory? Was there a defeat? Is not defeat the abdication of the real nature that has been developed by our geographical surroundings and the great secret atavism that binds us to the very depths of our history? Is not victory the triumph within us of that imperishable nature through which alone the conception of the life that is native to us can be manifested? Was a single Buddhistic temple destroyed, a single believer persecuted? Perhaps not. In India, the religious spirit

dominates dogma. One tide rises after another and, on the shore, leaves seaweed, shells, new corpses, new palpitating lives. Everything is mingled and confused —the Brahman officiates in the Buddhistic temples and venerates the statue of Buddha as well as those of Shiva, Brahma, and Vishnu. A given underground temple, begun in the first periods of Buddhism, continues to be dug out when the Tartars, after the Persians and the Arabs, have imposed Islam on half of the Indians.

II

For the Indians, all nature is divine and, below the great Indra, all the gods are of equal power and can threaten or dethrone the other gods, concrete or abstract—the sun, the jungle, the tiger, and the elephant; the forces which create and those which destroy —war, love, and death. In India everything has been god, everything is god or will be god. The gods change, they evolve, they are born and die, they may or may not leave children, they tighten or loosen their grip on the imagination of men and on the walls of the rocks. What does not die, in India, is faith—the immense faith, frenzied and confused under a thousand names; it changes its form ceaselessly, but always remains the same immeasurable power that urges the masses to action. In India there came to pass this thing: that, driven forth by an invasion, a famine, or a migration of wild beasts, thousands of human beings moved to the north or to the south. There at the shore of the sea, at the base of a mountain, they encountered a great wall of granite. Then they all entered the granite; in its shadows they lived, loved, worked, died, were born, and, three or four centuries afterward, they came out again, leagues away, having traversed the mountain. Behind them they left the emptied

Ajanta (II Century B.C. to VI Century A.D.). Fresco, detail.

rock, its galleries hollowed out in every direction, its sculptured, chiseled walls, its natural or artificial pillars turned into a deep lacework with ten thousand horrible or charming figures, gods without number and without name, men, women, beasts—a tide of animal life moving in the gloom. Sometimes when they found no clearing in their path, they hollowed out an abyss in the center of the mass of rock to shelter a little black stone.[1]

It is in these monolithic temples, on their dark walls or on their sunburnt façade, that the true genius of India expends all its terrific force. Here the confused speech of confused multitudes makes itself heard. Here man confesses unresistingly his strength and his nothingness. He does not exact the affirmation of a determined ideal from form. He incloses no system in it. He extracts it in the rough from formlessness, according to the dictates of the formless. He utilizes the indentations and the accidents of the rock. It is they that make the sculpture. If any room is left he adds arms to the monster, or cuts off his legs if the space is insufficient. If an enormous wall of rock suggests the broad masses of monsters that he has seen rolling in herds, rearing their heads on the banks of the rivers or at the edges of the forests, he cuts the wall into great pure planes to make an elephant of it. Wherever, by chance, the hollows and the projections occur, breasts swell, haunches tighten and move; the

[1] The illustration on page 15 represents a copy of the fresco of Ajanta—Shiva and Parvati—which the Indian Society has kindly authorized us to reproduce. This copy is from the brush of Nanda Lal Bose, a contemporary Indian painter and a pupil of Abanindra Nath Tagore. The school of Indian painting is being reborn, or rather, it continues. It has not ceased to take its inspiration from the Indian myths and legends that it treats—notably in the work of the two masters just cited—with a grave and tender melancholy, and according to the traditional forms of Hindu and Indo-Persian art. (See No. 200 of *L'Art Décoratif*, February, 1914.)

Reproduction authorized by the Indian Society (see page 14).

AJANTA (II Century B.C. to VI Century A.D.). Shiva and Parvati. Fresco. Copy, by Nanda Lal Bose.
(Woodroffe Collection.)

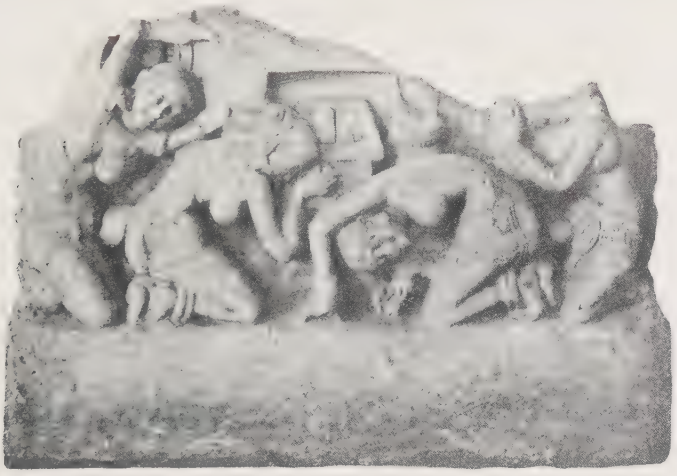
mating of men or beasts, combat, prayer, violence, and gentleness are born of matter that seems itself to be suffused with a vague intoxication. The roots of wild plants may split the forms, the blocks may crumble, the action of sun and water may gnaw the stone.

BHUWANESWAR (VI Century). The great temple, a pillar.

Yet the elements will not mingle all these lives with the confusion of the earth more successfully than the sculptor has done. Sometimes, in India, one finds enormous mushrooms of stone in the depths of the forests, shining in the green shadow like poisonous plants. Sometimes one finds heavy elephants, quite alone, as mossy and as rough skinned as if alive; they mingle with the tangled vines, the grasses reach their bellies,

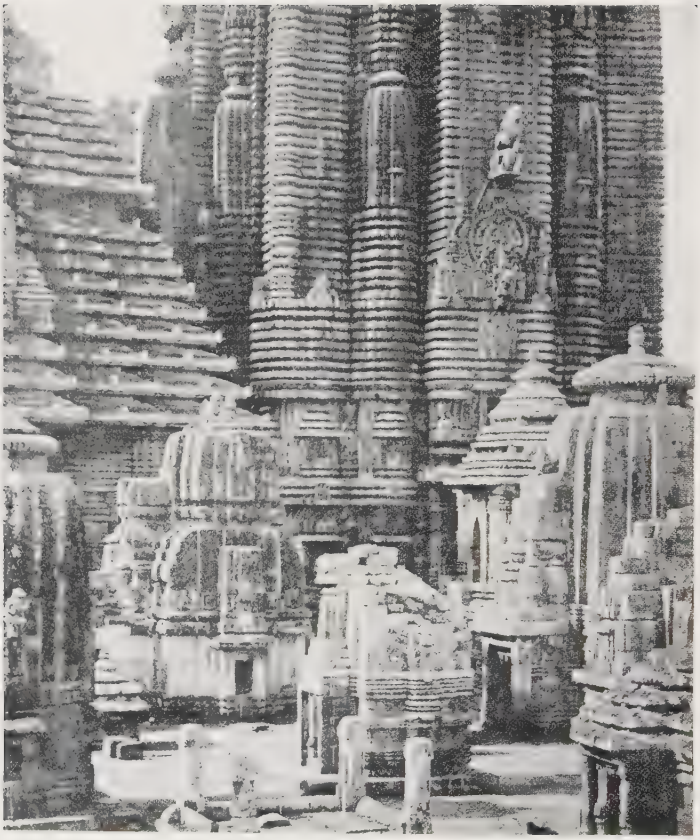
flowers and leaves cover them, and even when their debris shall have returned to the earth they will be no more completely absorbed by the intoxication of the forest.

The whole of Indian genius lies in this never-satisfied need for setting matter in motion, in this acceptance of



Amravati. Women in adoration.

the elements offered by matter, in this indifference to the fate of the forms that it has drawn from matter. Before the art that reveals to us this genius, one must not look for the expression which the Egyptian gave to his metaphysical system, an expression that was imposed, perhaps, upon the sculptor, but was none the less real; we must not look for the free expression of a social philosophy, as among the Greeks. What we have here is the dark and troubled expression—anonymous and profound, but immeasurably strong for that very reason—of the intuitive pantheism of the Indian. Man is no longer at the center of life. He



BHUWANESWAR (VI Century). The great temple, detail.

is no longer that flower of the whole world, which has slowly set itself to form and mature him. He is mingled with all things, he is on the same plane with all things, he is a particle of the infinite, neither more

Mahavellipore (viii Century). Monolithic temple. Milking.

nor less important than the other particles of the infinite. The earth passes into the trees, the trees into the fruits, the fruits into man or the animal, man and the animal into the earth; the circulation of life sweeps along and propagates a confused universe wherein forms arise for a second, only to be engulfed and then to reappear, overlapping one another, palpitating, penetrating one another as they surge like the waves. Man does not know whether yesterday he was not the very tool with which he himself will force matter to release the form that he may have to-

morrow. Everything is merely an appearance, and under the diversity of appearances Brahma, the spirit of the world, is a unity. To be sure, man has the mystical intuition of universal transformism. Through transmigrations, by passing from one appearance to another, and by raising within himself, through suffering and combat, the moving level of life, he will doubtless be pure enough one day to annihilate himself in Brahma. But, lost as he is in the ocean of mingled forms and energies, does he know whether he is still a form or a spirit? Is that thing before us a thinking being, a living being even, a planet, or a being cut in stone? Germination and putrefaction are engendered unceasingly. Everything has its heavy movement, expanded matter beats like a heart. Does not wisdom consist in submerging oneself in it, in order to taste the intoxication of the unconscious as one gains possession of the force that stirs in matter?

In the virgin forests of the south, between the heat of the sun and the fever of the soil, faith caused the temples to spring two hundred feet into the air, multiplied them from generation to generation, and surrounded them with ever-growing inclosures, whose position was constantly changed. Such an architecture could not issue from a source less powerful and less dim than the grottos hollowed out of the depths of the rocks. Artificial mountains were raised up, graded pyramids, wherein the thicket of forms moves as if alive. One is tempted to say that there was no plan for the construction of these forests of gods, as they bristle like cactus and evil plants, as they present profiles like the backs of primitive monsters. They seem to have been thrust up from the crust of the earth as if by the force of lava. It must have required ten thousand laborers, working together and by their own inspiration, but united by their fanaticism

Grottos of Mahavellipore (viii Century). The Sleep of Buddha.

and their desires, to build these titanic platforms, carve them from top to bottom, cover them with statues as dense as the lives of the jungle, and support them in space on the aërial festoon of the lacelike ogives and the inextricable scaffolding of the columns. Here are statues upon statues, colonnades upon colonnades; thirty styles are mingled, juxtaposed, super-

MAHAVELLIPORE (VIII Century). Bas-relief on the rock.

imposed. The columns may be round or square or polygonal, in sections or monolithic, smooth or fluted or covered with carving that has an appearance of danger, like masses of reptiles moving in oily circles, like pustules that throb and rise, like bubbles bursting under leaves spread over a heavy water. There, as everywhere in India, the infinitely little touches the infinitely big. Whatever the power of these temples, they seem to have sprung from the earth through the power of

the seasons, and at the same time to have been carved out minutely like an ivory sculpture.

MAHAVELLIPORE (VIII Century). Monolithic temple. Bas-relief on a wall, detail.

Forms are everywhere, tufted bas-reliefs are everywhere, from the surroundings of the temples to their summit, on the inner walls, and often on the top of the

columns where the whole of humanity, mingled with the whole of animal life, supports the burden of the entablatures and the roofs. Everything may serve to carry a statue, everything may swell into a figure—the capitals, the pediments, the columns, the upper stages of the pyramids, the steps, the balustrades, the banisters of stairways. Formidable groups rise and fall—rearing horses, warriors, human beings in clusters like grapes, eruptions of bodies piled one over the other, trunks and branches that are alive, crowds sculptured by a single movement as if spouting from one matrix. One has the impression that the old monolithic temple has been violently twirled and shot out of the earth. Save in the more recent epochs when he modeled bronzes of astonishing tenderness, firmness, and elegance, the Indian has never conceived sculpture as being able to live independent of the construction that it decorates. It seems a confused mass of buds on the body of a heavy plant.

III

Even out of doors, even in the full daylight, these forms are surrounded by a mysterious obscurity. The torsos, the arms, the legs, and the heads commingle—when a statue itself has not twenty arms, ten legs, four or five faces, when it is not laden with all these aspects of tenderness and fury by which life reveals itself. The depths of the sculpture undulate heavily, as if to force back into the moving eternity of primitive matter the still unformed beings that attempt to emerge from it. We see writhing larvæ, vague embryos; they seem incessant and successive attempts at gestation which start and miscarry in the intoxication and fever of a soil that continually creates.

As one views this sculpture from near by one must

ELEPHANTA (VIII Century). Colossal head.

not attempt to find in it the scientific modeling of the Egyptians or the philosophic modeling of Phidias, although Egypt and, to a greater degree, the Greece brought in by Alexander, profoundly influenced the first Buddhistic sculptors, perhaps even to the extent of revealing them to themselves. Sculpture is no longer considered in its planes and its passages, save summarily and by instinct. It might better be defined in terms of painting, for in these gigantic bas-reliefs light and shade play a vital and continuous part, as if a brush moved over them to soften and caress them. But Hindu painting, itself, while preserving the qualities of materiality that are in the sculpture, is perhaps more purified by the mind. The painting is usually the work of the monks; Buddhism has left a clear imprint on it. And later on it is especially in painting that, when Islam arrives, the influence of Persia makes itself felt. From the great Buddhistic decorations to the Mussulman miniatures, the spiritualization of the work sometimes touches the rarest, the highest, the most human harmony. One may not assign a place lower than that of the great classic works to the frescoes of Ajunta, in which the lyrical pantheism of the Hindus seems to fuse, for an hour, the spiritual radiance of Egyptian paintings and the moral intoxication of the old Chinese artists. By a kind of ethnic paradox the great painting of India would seem nearer to the linear rhythms, which are the chief preoccupation of the Egyptian or Greek sculptors, than Hindu sculpture itself, for the latter seeks to transfer to stone or metal the fleeting, flowing modeling of the painter. When we compare this sculpture with that of the anonymous workmen of Thebes or with that of the Athenian masters, we find something in it that is absolutely new, that is difficult to define—something like the obscure fermentation in a crucible, as compared with the

Tanjore (xi Century). The Pagoda.

limpidity of a theorem. The modeling aims at movement rather than at form. It is never considered in an isolated way nor in its abstract relationships with the neighboring figures. Material passages unite the figures among themselves; they are always heavy with atmosphere; the background is always felt; other figures partly absorb them; the modeling is fluctuating and billowy, like the mass of the leaves when labored by the wind. What models the rock, what rolls it into storm waves, is desire and despair and enthusiasm. It undulates like a crowd ravished by voluptuousness and fury. It swells and grows tense like the torso of a woman as she feels the approach of love.

As we have observed, it is the movement and not the form that interests the Indian sculptor, and so we do not find him seeking harmonies of relationships or clearly stated abstractions, but expressive masses which give an intoxicated, florid image of the whole world, and no longer seek for an equilibrium between the laws of the universe and the laws of the mind. By flashes, veiled by obscurity and by torpor, one can doubtless find everything in this art, overlapping the neighboring element, oppressing it or being oppressed by it; one can meet with brief jets of consciousness and sudden starts from the most rudimentary realism to the highest idealism. When one sees them isolated one notes the special quality of the figures, especially the figures of women, innumerable, gentle, religious, and yet formidable in their grace, their sensuality, their carnal heaviness. At every moment they give evidence of the effort—gigantic, vague, but often of a mighty fervor—toward a higher adaptation to their role in humanity. The man of India loves to see the waist bend under the weight of the breasts and the haunches, he likes long tapering

DELHI (XII Century). Jain Colonnade. (*Mosque of Koutab.*)

forms and the single wave of the muscles as a movement surges through the whole body. But this hymn to the more tender forms of beauty is lost in the clamor of the universe. At one and the same time he can

The Dance of Shiva (XII Century). Bronze, detail. (*Museum of Madras.*)

adore Indra, the supreme being; Brahma, the creator; Shiva, the destroyer; Krishna, the redeemer; Surya, the light of day; Lakshmi, who is love; Sarvasti, who is science; and the horrible Kali seated in putrefaction and the clotted blood of his victims. He can adore the ten incarnations of Vishnu and the crowd of heroes and monsters of his immense mythology and of the national epics, Ravana, Sougriva, Hanoumat, and Ananta. He can invoke Rama, the incorruptible hero who would have led the Greeks to the threshold of

divinity. Rama is only one idol more in the prodigious pantheon, an idol lost among the gods of fecundity and death. On his walls he can bring together ferocity and indulgence, asceticism and lubricity, fornications and apostleships; he can mingle obscenity and heroism. Heroism and obscenity appear no more important in the life of the universe than the fighting or mating of a pair of insects in the woods. Everything is on the same plane. Why not let instinct spread out through nature with the indifference of the elemental forces and, in its onrush, sweep away moralities and systems? Social idealism is vain. Impassible eternity wears away the long effort of man. The Indian artist has not the time to bring the human form to its realization. Everything that it contains is contained as possibility. A prodigious life animates it —an embryonic life, however, and one that seems

Lakshmi, bronze (xiv Century). (*Private Collection.*)

condemned never to choose between the confused solicitations of the energies of the will and the energies of the senses. Man will change nothing of his final destiny, which is to return sooner or later to the unconscious and the formless. In the fury of the senses or

Gwalior (xv Century). The Palace.

the immobility of contemplation, he must therefore descend unresistingly into the chaos of the elements.

The withdrawal of the Indian soul from preoccupation with morality, its pantheistic confusion and disorder, cut it off almost constantly from the great abstract constructions that characterize the aspiration of the ancient peoples of the Occident. In India, the eye does not seize things in their ensemble until it has taken in all their details. In Egypt, the desert, the horizon, and the straight line of the river, as in Greece the winding bays, the transparent waters, and the clear-cut crests of the hills, had made of man a meta-

physician or a philosopher, loving the rhythm or the sinuous continuity that he observed in the universe; but here it required too many days to reach the mountains, the rivers were too vast and too muddy for one to see to their depths, the forests were too dense to

Binderabund (xvi Century). A temple.

permit the eye to take in at once the harmonious line of the trees, the outline of their leaves, the true form of the creeping animals that appear only in a flash, to flee from death or to inflict it. Man is surrounded by an unpassable barrier of luxuriant life, the eye is dazzled by the ceaselessly broken and mingled colors and lines of flowers that rain sparkling dust, of vines, of beasts fantastically marked; one is caught up in the feverish spirit of the germs of life and death that roll under the ocean of leaves. The disorder of the material world of the Indian intoxicates his soul and brings him

to that pantheistic mysticism that every sensual being can feel rising within him in supreme moments of love, when, through the embrace of the woman who yields to him, he feels the confused and real presence of the universe. In the architecture of India we must not seek that linear abstraction which, by its continuity, expresses the visible rhythm of life; what is sought and found is life itself, gathered up hastily and pressed pell-mell into form. It is part of the quivering skin of the earth from which it was torn. The unity of the world is expressed in it by the heaping up at one point in space of everything that belongs to life, from the densely populated soil to the solitude of the heavens, and from the motionless mountains to the roll of the seas.

IV

However, to the north and the northeast of India, in the regions where the forests are less heavy, where the glaciers are nearer, and the jungle is cut into here and there by great desert spaces, the synthesis was infinitely less instinctive, more abstract, and therefore more sober. It was by this route, indeed, that Greece had entered India, as Rome came later, and Byzantium and Persia which, from the depths of its history, brought the memory of Assyria, of Chaldea, and perhaps of Egypt. With Persia also came Islam, a spiritualizing force that did not love the images and despised the idols. Finally, by way of Lisbon and Venice, there came the Occident of the Gothic age and of the Renaissance. But India is a crucible so ebullient in its heat that for centuries it forced Islam to submit to its genius, to cover the walls of its mosques with living arabesques —lotus, flowering vines, figures of men and of monsters. The Greek statue, hastily imitated by the first sculp-

tors, was forgotten as quickly as it had become known. The disquieting elegance of the works that it inspired was only a prelude to the retaliation soon to be made by a sensuality impossible to restrain. Though captivated for a moment by the unbounded grace and

Indo-Mussulman Art (xvii Century). The Taj-Mahal of Agra.

reason of the Greeks, India was to manifest its own power through the wandering smile of the mouths, through the smothered flame, the enervation, and the ascetic thinness of the bodies. When northern India carried its religion into the south, it also brought with it the pure column that had supported the luminous pediments on all the acropolises of the Occident. But the column was to be overwhelmed by the extravagant growth of the living forests of stone. India assimilated everything, transformed everything, submerged everything under the mounting tide of her ever-moving

force. Grandiose civilizations passed over her and sowed her deserts and her woods with the cadavers of cities. What matter? Here neither time counts, nor men. Evolution returns upon itself at every moment. Like a sea, the Hindu soul is eternally mobile, between fixed shores. At no moment can one say, here the race ascends, here is its apogee, here its fall. In the crucible some substances melt, others are liquid and burning, and others cold and hard. India is the enigma, the protean, unseizable being without beginning and without end, without laws and without purposes, mingled with everything and yet alone in the intoxication which she cannot exhaust.

Thus the aristocratic and more abstract art of the north, although we may find in it traces of the Mediterranean civilizations, from Chaldea and Egypt to feudal and neopagan Europe, remains at bottom as Indian as the art of the Dravidians of the south. As it rises from the Dekkan toward the Himalayas, the pyramid becomes rounder. In central India its lines become curves, and though it is still striped like the skin of the tigers, it is less laden with ornaments and is almost without statues. In the valley of the Ganges, the curvature, upon contact with the Persian dome, is more pronounced and the vault, built of flat stones in tiers, takes on the form of the cupola or of the kiosk, supported by frail pillars hemispherical, ovoid, stocky, pressed down or swelling out, polygonal or circular, sometimes bare like those of the mosques, or carved and capped with turbans like those of the Dravidian pyramids—the domes look like enormous fat tubercles bulging with spongy matter. The form is just such a one as Indian sensualism has at all times desired. India, land of ruins that it is, must have seen the complete disappearance, a thousand years before our era, of edifices that much resembled those forests of bul-

bous domes, temples, or mausoleums that she was still building in our day. The Ramayana speaks frequently of "palaces whose white peaks foam into heaps of cloud."

Even before the domination of the Great Moguls,

Miniature of the XVII Century. (*Private Collection.*)

the Tartar emperors, who came at the beginning of modern times to impose order and peace on northern

India, the temple of the basin of the Ganges already had, despite its wealth of ornament, a character of equilibrium and of abstract unity that one never finds in the south. The sensualism of the Indians, which caused the southern sculptors to enter the mountains, germinates in the consciousness of the north in trage-

Trichinopoly (xviii Century). Pagoda of Sriringam.

dies, in poems, in hymns of words and of stone. But if the walls are barer, the forms more peaceful and retiring, if there are longer silences, and if the dome is more abstractly calculated, the temple receives its visitors with more reserve, the mystic intoxication is less heavy. In the south what spoke was the profound soul of India, a wild murmur which we hear throughout the whole existence of this people, and which breaks out spontaneously at every place that it inhabits. In the north the voice of the higher castes dominates the chorus of the people, and does so with infinitely more majesty, power, and splendor because these castes grew from the soil of India like a natural vegetation and because they were able to build up the

TRICHINOPOLY (XVIII Century). Pagoda of Sriringam.
(The Court of the Horses.)

most grandiose philosophic synthesis that man has ever conceived.

The sensual richness of the south, purified by the metaphysical spirit and rarefied by the aristocratic spirit, is found again in the details of ornament in the sanctuaries, as soon as one has crossed their threshold. The Jain temples of central India have pillars as finely cut as glassware, and the arches that carry their forests of white cupolas to the heavens turn into lace under the hands of the sculptors; and yet, despite the over-minute science of the decorators, these buildings express a living faith. In the monarchies of the north, on the contrary, the vanity of the rajahs throws so luxurious a garment over the artists' enthusiasm that its bareness and also the best of its human value are lost together. There are temples stuffed with gods of silver and gold, whose eyes are rubies or diamonds. Drops of fire gleam in the shadows; the royal robe of the tigers, the iridescent plumage of tropical forests, their flowers, and the shining tails of peacocks incrust the sheathing of metal, ivory, or enamel that covers the pillars and the walls with emeralds, amethysts, pearls, topazes, and sapphires. It is an art of externals, and its unvarying magnificence is of a paler light than that of statues in a temple underground. The spirit of feudal India is rather in the great rectangular castles, bare and austere, closed in like fortresses, defended by high towers, and cuirassed with polychromed enamel; it is in the palaces of white marble by the silent waters.

V

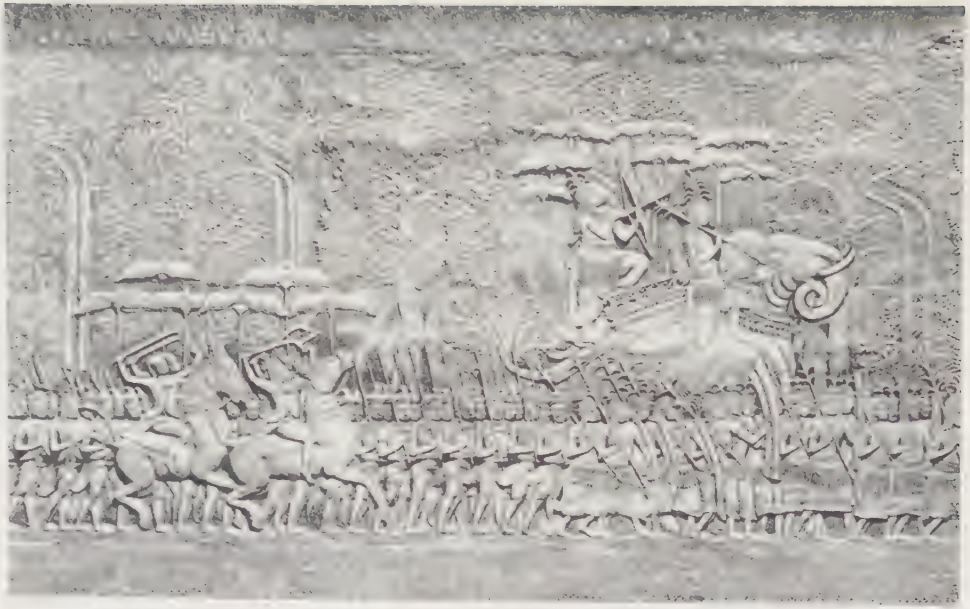
The Occident of the Middle Ages, the Occident of the fortresses and the Romanesque buildings, is certainly less out of place in the hierarchical India of the

north than in the democratic India of the south. In one place as in the other, the abstraction descends from the dominating classes to crush the miserable classes beneath the petrified symbol of its external power. But the Hellenic Occident where, on the contrary, the abstraction rose from the masses to express its inner power through the voice of the heroes—the Hellenic Occident and also the Gothic Occident would more easily recognize the trace of their dream if they followed the torrent of ideas that crossed the mountains, the swamps, the virgin forests, and the sea, to spread to the peninsula of Indo-China, to the Dutch Indies, and to Java. The spread of Indian ideas is witnessed in the gigantic temples that cover Java; it is seen even more in the fortresses, the palaces, and the temples absorbed little by little by the jungles of Cambodia, the home of the mysterious race of the Khmers. They lived in a country less overwhelming than India, for, despite the denseness of the forests, the undergrowth was certainly less redoubtable, the fruits were more abundant, the rivers more full of fish, and life was easier and freer. Moreover, the metaphysical and moral life of China had

KHMER ART. Head of Buddha.

come to give something of its peace to the troubled and heavy atmosphere of tropical nature. Finally, five or six hundred years after the disappearance of Buddhism from Hindustan, perhaps about the tenth century of our era, the Khmer people were still Buddhists, as were the people of Java. Among the latter the decorative sculpture of eastern Asia, sending forth one of its most heavily laden branches, causes the monuments of Java to blossom from top to bottom with bas-reliefs as mobile as paintings. The moral epic of Buddha unrolls in them amid perfumed forests crowded with fruit, with birds, and with beasts, among choruses and musicians who furnish accompaniment to the nonchalant and lascivious grace of the women that pray and dance and people the intoxicated sleep of the god with abundant dreams. But the Khmer people, in its Buddhism, betokened a preoccupation with moral balance and with harmony that is practically unknown to the sculptors of the grottos of Ellora and of the pyramidal temples.

The orgy of ornament, to be sure, never went farther. This was a necessary result of the still denser, more flowery, and more populous forests of the country, of the humidity which is warmer, and of the fever which is more intoxicating. But the ornament obeys a splendidly balanced rhythm. Twining lines of flowers, of fruits, of vines, of palms, and rich plants creep over the walls from top to bottom, over the sloping surfaces, over the tops of the doors, and up to the summit of the four sides of the high tiaras of Brahma which here replace the Indo-Persian cupola and the Dravidian pyramid; but the decorative forms marry so well with the line of the architecture that they lighten it and seem to lift it to an aërial level of leaves, of winding stems, of hanging foliage that together form a silent, whirling rain of petals and perfumes.



KHMER ART. The procession, bas-relief. (*Palace of Angkor-Vat.*)

The Khmer sculptor gives a form to all those things which, as a rule, strike our inner sensibility only through what we hear, what we taste, and what we feel. His carving tells of the murmurs, the gleams, and the odors of the forest, the cadenced sound of marching

KHMER ART. The rowers, bas-relief. (*Palace of Angkor-Vat.*)

troops, low tones of birds that coo their love song, the hoarse, dull rattle in the throats of wild beasts as they roam through the jungles, and the invisible fluid that circulates in the nerves of the women who dance when the music drones and when voluptuous feeling mounts in their veins. The secret heart of the world beats, tumultuously and regularly, in the crowds that pass under impenetrable branches, whether they sing all together or prepare for massacres or the feast, for death, for justice, or for the building of palaces. And yet, in that inner order which gives these sculptural symphonies so much rhythmical strength, everything interpenetrated without a break. The transmigration of the

thinkers of India causes the rock itself to quiver. Animal forms and vegetable forms pass one into the other, vines blossom into figures; reptiles, feet, and hands sprout and become lotus flowers. What matter? The luxuriant universe is good, since the divine countenance of him who consoles appears behind every leaf,

KHMER ART. Frieze of the Apsaras, fragment. (*Palace of Angkor-Vat.*)

since he loved everything, down to the snakes themselves. The heroes, the elephants, and the tigers that guard the temples or border the avenues, the immense cobras with seven heads stretched out, that frame the pediments or creep along the balustrades, have an indulgent visage and a welcoming smile, despite their clubs, their claws, and their teeth. Buddha is all love. The forces of the earth have penetrated him to spread humanity throughout his being. And so, on the highest branch of black trees, full of poisonous juices and swarming from roots to leaves with beasts that distil death, there is a flower.

The story of Sakyamuni, from his birth to his sleep in Nirvana, flowers on the walls of the sanctuaries. The Khmer sculptor grows tender over the god man of the Orient even as, at about the same time, the Gothic artisan grows tender as he recounts the birth and passion of the god man of the Occident. Everywhere we find smiles of goodness, everywhere open arms, heads inclining on friendly shoulders, hands clasping gently, and the ingenuous impulse toward abandon and confidence. Man is everywhere in search of man. The spirit of evil, Ravana, with the hundred hands from which plants and grasses are born, whose feet traverse forests peopled with animals — the spirit of evil may come upon the scene, innumerable figures of men may struggle under avalanches of flowers, like the spirit besieged by the seductions of the earth. What matter? Against backgrounds of heavy trees, armies march. Rama advances across forests. Man will end by attaining, were it only for a moment, the accord between his social life and his most tyrannical instincts. Neither bestiality nor asceticism. Not only are the heroes of the will surrounded by friendly flowers and the fruits they may easily pluck from the branches that bend over their passing, but there are even gar-

KHMER ART. Decorative figure. (*Angkor-Thom.*)

JAVA (IX Century?). The musicians. Detail from the life of Buddha.
(*Temple of Boro-Boudour.*)

lands of naked bayaderes who await them at the end of their road, each one different and all the same, dancing yet almost motionless, as they mark the rhythm of the music that one guesses, the inner pulsation of the wave that runs through them. For the second time since the origin of man, intellectual effort and the joy of the senses seem to agree for the space of an hour. Furtive, no doubt, and more summary, but also fuller, more musical, more clogged with matter, heavier laden, and moving against a background of trees and flowers, the modeling of Greece seems to suggest itself here and there.

JAVA (IX Century?). Detail from the life of Buddha. (*Temple of Boro-Boudour.*)

Thus, eternally balanced between its heroism and its sensuality, passing at every moment and without transition from the extreme of moral love to the extreme of material intoxication, from the highest aristocracy of culture to the most impulsive satisfactions of instinct, the Indian soul wanders across living forests of sentiment and system in search of the law. In its ensemble, and in spite of its oases of hope and of cool sentiment, it is pessimistic and cruel. The men of India have no more need to inflict pain or death than other men. They are of the true human clay; they

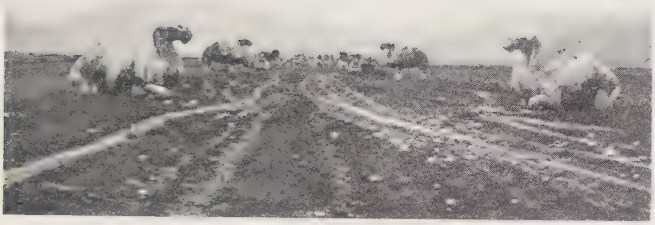
are kneaded with weakness, they are armored with iron and gold, they are swept along to love at one moment, to death at another, according as the air they breathe brings them the odor of the trees, of the oceans, or of the deserts. In every case, here as elsewhere, the

Java (IX Century?). Detail from the life of Buddha, bas-relief. (*Temple of Boro-Boudour.*)

loftiest energy and brute matter wed constantly. The manifestations of instinct, which is hurled with all its strength into the immensity of life, arouse the loftiest sentiment of superior natures. If, after much suffering, the Indian sages rise above good and evil to gain indifference, it is because the crowd, in India, had plunged into the intoxication or the horror of life without knowing either good or evil.

As balance, for them, could be realized only at brief moments in the average life of society, they sought it

outside the conditions of that society, in the bosom of an immeasurable harmony, where life and death, whose origins and ends we do not know, mingle their equal powers and know no other limits than themselves. Let life, then, exhaust itself with living until death comes! Let death, in its putrefaction, cause life to flower and reflower! Why should one try to infuse the energies of nature into the harmony of consciousness? Disciplined for a moment, the energies of nature will take the upper hand again, and once more will roll the will and the hopes of man into the confused intoxication of their regenerated youth.



Road of the Ming Tombs

Chapter II. CHINA

I

IN India, it is still ourselves that we see. If the grandiose pessimism, which makes her plastic language so intoxicating, opens up to us regions in ourselves that we had not explored, it dominates us from the first, because the rhythm of that language relates it, secretly, with all those other languages that express Occidental optimism. In China, on the contrary, we no longer understand. Although it includes a third of mankind, this country is the most distant, the most isolated of all. We are confronted with a method that escapes us almost absolutely, with a point of departure that is not ours, with a goal that does not resemble ours, with a movement of life that has neither the same appearance nor the same direction as ours. To realize unity in the

spirit is, doubtless, what the Chinese tends toward, as we do. But he does not seek that unity along the roads where we seek it.

China has not, however, remained as closed as it is said to have been. It mingled with Aryanism incessantly, to the point of producing mixed civilizations, as in Indo-China and in Tibet, for example, where it allowed the rivers of love pouring from the Hindu soul to carry a little of their disquieting ardor into its serious, positive, easy-going, and rather sullen soul. It knew the worlds that were the farthest removed from it, and the most ancient. Rome trafficked with it two thousand years ago; Chaldea, twenty centuries before Rome, taught it astronomy. Nearer to our time, Islam affected it to the point of bringing twenty or thirty millions of Chinese to the god of Mohammed. In the sixteenth century, after the Mongol conquest, Pekin was perhaps the most cosmopolitan and the most open city in the world. The Portuguese and the Venetians sent their merchants there, and the imperial court had artists and savants come from India, from Persia, and even from western Europe.

However, as far back as we look into the past of China, it seems not to have moved. The myth period of its life ends about the century of Pericles, perhaps; the apogee of its vital power oscillates between the fifth and the fifteenth century of our era, its decline begins at the hour when the Occident is about to put its stamp on history. But one must look closely to distinguish one or another of these phases of its activity. The material testimony of its legendary period that comes down to us does not differ very greatly from what it is producing in our own day, and if its most vigorous effort coincides with that of the Middle Ages of the Occident, the fact would seem to demonstrate only the more clearly—through the insensible passages

that attach it to its past and its present—that it has never come out of its own Middle Ages and that we do not know when it entered upon them. In reality, it is the inner world of the Chinese that has never opened for us. It is in vain that we feel their social civilization as more perfect than our own, it is in vain that we

Chang Dynasty (xviii to xii Centuries B.C.). Daiban bowl, bronze. (*Musée Cernuschi.*)

admire the results among them of a moral effort that was as great as our own. We do not always understand them better than we do the ants or the bees. There is the same mystery, awe inspiring and almost sacred. Why are we so made that we can conceive only of our own mode of association and only our own mechanism of reasoning? Whether the Chinese is superior to us or inferior is something that it is impossible for us to say, and the problem, thus presented, is without sig-

nificance. The Chinese has followed an evolution that we have not followed; he constitutes a second branch of the human tree that separated from the first; we do not know whether their branches will reunite.

The Indo-European world turns, with all its instinct, toward the future. The Chinese world, with all its consciousness, turns toward the past. Therein lies the gulf which, perhaps, cannot be crossed. There is the whole secret of the power of expansion of the Occident, of the hermitism of China, of the strange impersonality of its plastic language. Taken in the mass, China shows no change in time, no movement in space. One would say that it expresses a people of old men, ossified from infancy. It is never to himself that the Chinese looks for his law; it is to his father, to his grandfather, and, beyond his father and grandfather, to the infinite multitude of the dead who govern him from the depths of the centuries. And in fact, it is not the law that he asks, but the recipe for adapting himself to the surroundings that nature has made for him, surroundings, moreover, which change but little.

Chow Art (vii Century B.C.). Tripod, terra cotta. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

At first, one thinks of Egypt, of its geological and agricultural immobility, of its impersonal, collective art, hermetical and abstract. But Egypt is restless; it cannot quench the flame that, despite the will of the

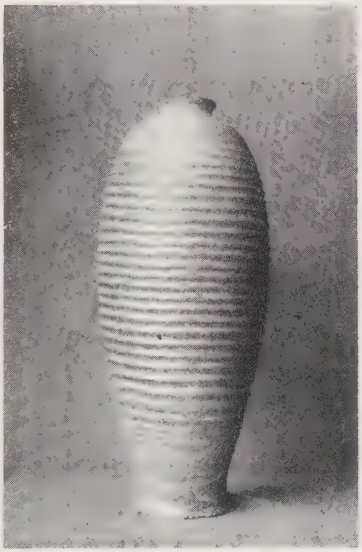
HAN ART (from the II Century B.C. to the II Century A.D.).
Tiger, marble, guardian of the temple of Sniang-fou.
(*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

people, bursts from the heart of the material in which they worked with such passion. An invincible idealism crowded them to a horizon which was distasteful for them to behold. The Chinese also evolved under outside influence, unquestionably, but around the same

Han Art (from the II Century B.C. to the II Century A.D.). Bas-relief of Ou-Lang-Tse, print of the stone. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

fixed point. He remained practical and self-centered, narrowly realistic, devoid of imagination, and, in reality, without desires. Where the Egyptian people suffers from the domination of the priest and tries to forget him by exploring life in its depths, the Chinese accepts without revolt the tyranny—the benevolent tyranny, we may observe—of the mandarin, because it in no wise disturbs the doting satisfaction of his tastes. At least, we know nothing of the immemorial evolutions

which must have led him to that state of mind. Confucius regulated morality once for all; it remained fixed in very accessible formulas and kept to its traditional rut through the unquestioning, dogmatic respect, ritualized and blind, that one owes to one's parents, to the parents of one's parents, to the dead parents of one's ancestors. The upward movement, which characterizes life for us and prevents us from arresting it in a definite formula, crystallized, for the Chinese, into a form which is perhaps not always the same, but through which one gets back to the same principle, a form determined by this principle to the minutest detail. The Chinese is satisfied with it, he has no need to seek any other principle. In reality, if he remains motionless, it is because he has so many native virtues and because his imagination atrophies through never having to exert itself or to struggle. He will receive without difficulty the moral teachings of Buddhism and later on of Islam, because they are practically in agreement with the essential part of what Confucius brought to him. In the religion of Confucius he will find even the belief in Nirvana of the one and the fatalism of the other, and they will cause



Art Later than Han (iii to iv Century A.D.). Ovoid vase with screw decoration. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

him to lull into indifference whatever momentary impulses toward revolt he may have.

As far back as we go into the distant childhood of China, we find the race already molded to certain metaphysical abstractions and certain moral entities from which all later forms of expression will descend. The Aryan goes from the concrete to the abstract, the Chinese from the abstract to the concrete. With the Aryan, the general idea is the flower of objective observation, and abstraction is always a thing in process of evolution. With the Chinese, the general idea seems to precede the objective study of the world and the progress of the abstraction ends sharply as soon as a moral law sufficient to sustain social relationships has appeared to the philosopher. In the Occident the symbol comes out of life, and frees itself from life, little by little, through progressive generalizations which are forever broadening, or which start out anew on other bases. In China the symbol governs life and shuts it in from every side.

The ever-changing reality which the Occidental desires, the idealistic conquest which tempts him, and man's attempt to rise toward harmony, intelligence, and morality seem to remain unsuspected by the Chinese. He has found, at least he thinks he has found, his mode of social relationships. Why should he change? When we denounce his absence of idealism, perhaps we are only saying that his old ideal realized its promises long ago and that he enjoys the unique privilege of maintaining himself in the moral citadel of which he has been able to gain possession, while, around him, everything ebbs away, decomposes, and re-forms itself. However that may be, we shall never see him approach form with the desire to make it express the adaptation by the human being of his intellect and his senses to surrounding nature. That

Buddhist Art (Wei) (v Century, second half). Kwan-Yu, soft stone. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

is what the whole of ancient art and the whole of Renaissance art did, but when the Chinese turns to form, it is with the will to draw from it a tangible symbol of his moral adaptation. He will always aim at moral expression, and will do so without requiring the world to furnish him with other elements than those which he knows in advance he will find in it; he will require no new revelations from the gestures which translate it. Morality will be crystallized in the sentences that guide him. He has only to treat nature as a dictionary whose pages he will turn until he finds the physiognomies and the forms which, in their combination, are the proper ones to fix the teachings of the sages. The agitation of the senses no longer comes upon him save by surprise—when he studies the elements of the plastic transposition too closely, and his science of form, detached wholly from material things, no longer serves him for more than the defining of abstractions. His immobile art demonstrates acquired truth, instead of affirming new intuitions.

To sum up, the Chinese does not study the material of the world that he may ask it to instruct him. He studies it when he needs to objectify his beliefs in order to attach more firmly to them the men who share them. It is true that he brings to this study gifts of patience, tenacity, and slowness which are beyond comparison. The ancient gropings of the first Chinese artists escape us. . . . One would say that for ten or twenty centuries they studied, in secret, the laws of form before demanding of form that it express the laws of the spirit.

II

In China, plastic expression is a kind of conventional graphology analogous to writing. The first Chinese painters were the Buddhist monks who, in the course

of the same centuries in which the Christian monks were gathering up the debris of the mind of antiquity, cultivated in their monasteries the only flower of high

Buddhist Art (Wei) (v Century). Grottos of Yunkang. The great Buddha. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

idealism that blossomed on this immovable soil for thirty centuries; and note that these first Chinese painters were also writers. There were no other painters than the poets, and they painted and wrote with the same brush and caused the poem and the

image to comment one on the other interminably. The ideographic signs which required a lifetime to learn and which were clothed in a kind of spiritual beauty that the artists seized in the tenuity, the thickness, or the complexity of the black arabesques with which they covered the white paper, brought them

Buddhist Art (Wei) (v Century). Grottos of Yunkang. Bas-relief. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

little by little to handle the brush dipped in India ink with consummate ease. Whenever their poetry, born of the same current of feeling as the painting, had felt the freshness and the calm of the world around the monasteries, isolated in the upper valleys, the painters who commented upon this poetry looked upon the world with an innocence that had never before been permitted, by their traditional philosophy, to Chinese artists. Landscape, that instrument of liberation and conquest, appeared to them suddenly. And at that

Buddhist Art (v Century). Bas-relief on rock. Grottos of Yunkang. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

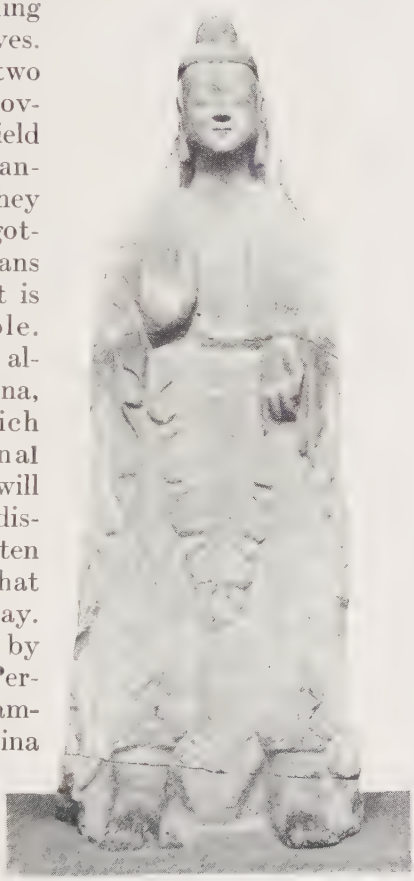
moment the Buddhist soul found in them its most serene expression.[1]

Never did the Chinese painters, despite the brevity of their style, go so far as their pupils, the artists of Nippon, in the schematized stylization of nature. Here there was no question of decorating houses or temples. They illustrated poems for themselves, in that profoundly gentle and yet profoundly egoistic spirit of the anchorite who has attained to peace from the life of the passions. The agitation of the cities did not reach them. The images, which they traced on the silk with a minuteness that knew no lassitude, or which they slowly brought to birth from the dabs of ink that their brush pressed into the rice paper, often expressed nothing but the inner peace of the philosopher as he thumbs the writings of the sages, amid indulgent trees or at the edge of pure waters. They heard no other sounds than those of the torrents in the mountain or the bleating of the herds. They loved the hours when the day is undefined, the glow of moonlight nights, the hesitation of the middle seasons, the mists that mount at dawn from the flooded rice fields.[2] They had gathered a freshness of soul like that of the morning in which the birds intoxicate themselves.

It is almost impossible to consider Chinese painting according to that harmonious curve which, in the case of almost all the other schools, seems to sum up all the elements of the work: from its beginning, through the progressive expansion of the elements later on into a balanced expression, and, later still, to their disorder and their dispersal. According to the place, according to the circumstances, the aspect of a century will change. Here, for example, Buddhistic hieratism will not appear. There, it will be prolonged up to the threshold of the modern world, isolated in some region

[1] M. Paléologue, *L'Art Chinois.* [2] *Ibid.*

that lies far away from the centers of life, or, in the depths of some well-guarded cloister, thoroughly cut off from the surrounding world that lives and moves. It sometimes takes two hundred years for a province to accept and to yield to the sentiments of another province, where they have already been forgotten. Among the Tibetans this is constant, but it is also more explicable. Korea, for example, always lags behind China, whereas Japan, which leaps over transitional stages, can imitate at will either a form which disappeared from China ten centuries ago or one that is scarcely born to-day. Tibet is impregnated by India, Turkestan by Persia, Indo-China by Cambodia and Laos. In China itself we find the same thing, according to the dynasty, the school, the region, or the religion. A thing apart, as it is everywhere, and almost immovable in time and space, Buddhist art remains distinct from everything that is not itself. It weakens, evidently, in proportion



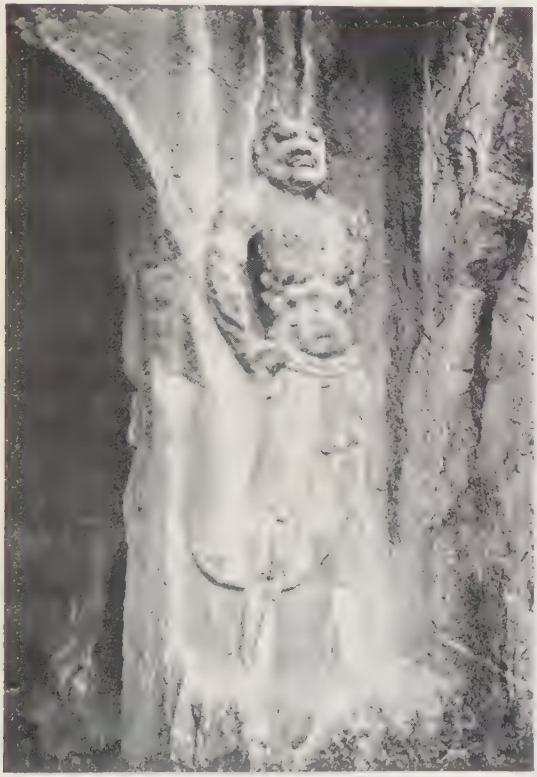
Buddhist Art (Wei) (second half of v Century). Kwan-Yn in soft stone. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

as faith descends, but it still remains distinct and distant, a language symbolic of the infinite and the universal, a spiritual light concentrated in a seated human form and flowing inexhaustibly from all the surfaces of that figure.

If we consider Chinese painting in its entirety and without allowing for its local attempts at emancipation, the artificial survivals from periods when it succumbed, and the general confusion of its development, we may say that some fifteen centuries passed before Chinese egoism consented to tear itself from the contemplative life. Only then could it go down to the torrent where the kingfisher watches for his prey, or furtively approach the bough on which the nightingale, chilled by the dawn, ruffles his plumage as he rolls his last sob, or observe the blackbirds hopping on the snow. It was scarcely before the Ming dynasty, in the fourteenth or in the fifteenth century, that the Chinese painters looked closely at the birds, the fishes, and the flowers, as if to bequeath to Japan, which was asking their instruction, the incomparable science with which two or three thousand years of practical and immediately interested observation had equipped them. With disconcerting facility they disdained, at this moment, the conventional language that had made their art so glorious; they abandoned the disciplined liberty that enabled them to express abstractions of sentiment merely by respecting and exalting the laws of harmony.

Let us turn away from the birds, the fishes, the flowers, the things to be described in their physical aspects; let us for the moment disregard the direct, pure, and clear portraits whose candid penetrating glance astonishes us; let us also forget the embroidered screens and the decorative paintings with their tremulous movement that recalls the flutter of wings. We then perceive what the great painting of China is;

it invades our spirit like a wave of music. It awakens intimate and vague sensations, impossible to seize, but of a limitless profundity; they pass one into



Buddhist Art (Wei) (vi to vii Century). Grottos of Long-Men. Guardian of the Gates.
(*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

another, gradually welling up until we are completely overcome by them. We cannot discern their origin or their end. The forms in Chinese painting have the

appearance of still being partly in the clasp of the primeval clay. Or one might say that they appear through a layer of water so limpid, so calm, that it does not disturb the tones which have been fixed and immobilized under it for a thousand years. Whether

Buddhist Art (Wei) (vi to vii Century). Grottos of Long-Men, bas-relief. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

they tell us of a pollen of flowers, of the undefined shades on the throats of birds, or of the subtle colors that rise from the depths of ripening fruits, the silk paintings of China have nothing in common with the object. They are states of the soul in the presence of the world, and the object is only a sign—deeply loved, certainly—which, according to the way it acts and combines with other objects, suggests that state of soul. The transformation is complete and constant. And through it, when the Chinese paints or rather evokes things like the depths of the ocean, which he has never seen, he does it with a poetry so profound that it creates reality. Thus, on a canvas the size of a nap-

kin, a heron preens his plumage in the morning mist—and the immensity of space is suggested. Space is the perpetual accomplice of the Chinese artist. It condenses around his paintings with such slow subtlety that they seem to emanate from it. The masters lay on their blacks and their reds with gentleness and power, as if they were drawing them forth little by little from the patina of dark amber which they seem to have foreseen and calculated. Children play, women pass, sages and gods converse, but that is never what one sees. One hears peaceful melodies that light on the heart in waves of serenity.

T'ang Art (vii Century). Tomb of Tchao-Ling. Mandarin. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

But serenity, unfortunately, is exhausted as quickly as is enthusiasm, for it also is a result of effort. When the Chinese artists departed from the original sources of their inspiration, they resorted to wine in order to attain the mental state prescribed by the sages, and in the artificial enthusiasm of the stimulant, in which they indulged more and more, they discovered their fire, their joy, their irony, their serenity even, in proportion to the amount they drank and to the turn of their minds.

In gaining mastery over themselves they destroyed their own life. From century to century, with the strange slowness that characterizes the activity of the Chinese, their painting, which had been taken into the service of the imperial court as soon as it left the monasteries, followed the evolution of their other means of expression. It turned to traditionalism, and did so with an obstinacy especially dangerous, since, if painting is to live, it must remain the most individual of all languages. Here it developed in an almost unbreathable atmosphere of formulas, of rules and canons which were written down in twenty thousand works, codes, histories, lists of practitioners, titles of pictures, and technical treatises that transformed the art of painting into a kind of exact science and engendered thousands of imitators and plagiarists of an ability beyond belief. And so Chinese painting returned to its origins as a graphic art; it created enormous quantities of models to which the artist could resort for forms drawn in all their details and all their aspects, leaving him only the work of grouping them. The capital vice of Chinese calligraphy, which arrests the development of the mind by blocking the exchange of ideas and which carries abstraction into puerile sophistry, reappeared in the last expression of the art which it had endowed with its first technical tool. It is the form of revenge which the objective world takes when it is forgotten too quickly. That intoxication of the spirit known to men who have rid themselves of all shackles is denied to him who has lost the right to seek other forms for his equilibrium than those in which his ancestor found peace.

III

Here we have at once the anchor that holds firm the soul of China and its pitfall. The architecture of

luxury, the pagodas and the palaces, reveal this in the clearest light. Everything in them is preconceived and artificial, arranged for the demonstration of a certain number of immemorial rules of metaphysics and common sense. The faïence and the enamel of the

T'ang Art (vii Century). Tomb of Tchao-Ling, bas-relief. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

roofs, the blues, the greens, and the yellows, shining in the sun under the veil of dust always hanging over them, exist above all for the joy of the eyes, although each one of them symbolizes a meteorological phenomenon, or the forests, the plowed land, the waters, or some other strip of the earth's robe. And if everything is blue in the temples of heaven, everything red in the temples of the sun, everything yellow in the temples of the earth, everything blue-white in the temples of the moon, it is that there may be established, between the harmonies of the senses and the

Buddhist Art (early T'ang, vii Century). Bodhisatva.
(*J. Doucet Collection.*)

harmonies of nature, an intimate and continuous coherence, in which the serenity of the heart fixes itself, becomes immobile, and demonstrates to itself its certitude and necessity. But beneath the great need for unity and calmness, fetishism and magic patiently assert their rights. The placing of the edifice, the invariably uneven number of roofs superimposed on one another and turned up at the corners—a memory of Mongol tents—the little bells jingling at the slightest breeze, the monsters of terra cotta on the openwork cornices, the moral maxims painted everywhere, the scrolls of gilded wood, the whole mass of thorn bushes, arrises, crests, bristling and clawlike forms—everything shows how constantly the Chinese were concerned with attracting the genii of wind and water to the edifice and to the neighboring houses, or of keeping them away. We observe a similar idea in the great artificial parks, where all the accidents of the earth's surface, mountains, rocks, brooks, cascades, forests, and thickets

T'ang Art (viii Century). Tomb of Chouen-Ling. Ram. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

are imitated to the point of mania. It is as if the Chinese who, outside of the cities, never change the original aspect of their native soil, were expressing the respect it inspires in them by bringing it down to the scale of human luxury. The Chinese people is more submissive than religious, more respectful than enthusiastic. It is not that it lacks gods or that it does not believe them to be real. Those men who called themselves the disciples of the profound Lâo-Tsze, the Taoists, introduced among the Chinese as many divinities, perhaps, as are born and die every day on the soil of India. Moreover, all those beliefs that are interpreted only by the practices of popular superstition grind one against another and interpenetrate, so that in the same individual we almost always find them existing side by side. In reality, whether he is a Buddhist, a Taoist, a Moslem, or a Christian, the Chinese believes what he has been advised to believe, without experiencing the great mystic need to increase, to modify, or to impose his faith on others. His gods are abstractions of a practical and positive kind: longevity, riches, sensuality, literature, charity—or they are demons, protecting or hostile genii, the spirits of the earth, of the sky, the sea, the stars, the mountains, the cities, the villages, the winds, the clouds, and the running waters; or again they are deified scholars and writers. But they have no other importance. If the Chinese conducts himself properly, observing filial respect, obeying his ancestors and the Emperor and the mandarins who represent the Emperor, if he takes care to place his house in such a way that the spirits shall not be disturbed and that their watery, aërial, or subterranean dwellings are preserved—all of which reveals Chinese mastery of hygiene, meteorology, and agriculture—he does not doubt then that these spirits will look upon him with benevolence. No disquieting thoughts plow the

T'ang Art (viii Century). Tomb of Kiao-Ling. Ostrich, bas-relief. (*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

depths of his soul. When one roots out desire one kills remorse, but one also makes an end of the life of the dream.

What increases, in this age-old habit of discipline and moral obedience, is patience. The Chinese does not permit himself to imprint on matter the symbol of his abstractions until he has scrutinized forms for so long a time that all of them are defined in his memory by their essential character. When the flash of intuition illuminates our minds and we need to reach the law, we do not hesitate to thrust aside the accidentals that mask it. The Chinese, on the contrary, collects these accidentals, catalogues them, and uses them in order to demonstrate the law. His audacities cannot shock those who know his science. Since his abstraction is fixed, he may express the fact more clearly if he bends, warps, and twists form in every direction; and so he makes the wrinkles in his faces so deep that they must cut into the bone; he arms the mouth with a hundred teeth, and the shoulders with ten arms; the head is surmounted with a monstrous skull; the features grimace; the eyes stick out of the sockets or are sunk deep in them; he accentuates laughing or weeping with the most improbable lines; the breasts fall in folds on the fat of bellies; hips, arms, and legs are all awry, and fingers are knotted like tendrils of grape vine. Because of his philosophy he can cause monsters to crawl on his cornices, unfurl them in the yellow silk of his standards, and raise them up at the threshold of his palaces; he has created a whole army of heraldic dragons, of phœnixes, unicorns, and writhing chimeras, which are perhaps nothing more than a vague memory, transmitted by the old legends, of the last primitive monsters straying among the first men. In all of this we see the spirit that forces the literary men to obey a ritual until all their gestures are studied,

T'ang Art (618–906). Three figurines, terra cotta.
(*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

that causes the historians to deform history in order to make it fit the outline of their systems, that causes the gardeners to gnarl the trees and manufacture flowers, the fathers to crush the feet of their daughters, and executioners to cut men to pieces. Traditional morality will destroy life rather than adopt its free movement.

But also, when life is in accord with morality, when emotion and will meet in harmony, when the spirits of goodness, kindness, and justice dwell in the mind of the artist naturally, what goodness, kindness, and justice there are in the faces and the gestures of the gods! The great Buddhas of gilt wood sit on their beds of lotus, their hands open, their faces illumined by peace, their whole forms filling the shadow of the sanctuary with the glow of the absolute which penetrates them. To combat them and make men forget their serenity, the Taoist priest gathers from life every engaging expression that he can find—the divine smile and the dance of women, the quizzical kindness of the sages, the childlike joy of the saved, the indescribable and blithe atmosphere in which floats the trinity of happiness. A strange sweetness emanates from all those little works of wood and ivory, of jade and bronze, that people the pagodas and encumber the flat baskets with the colored-paper signs along the crowded streets where the refuse of humanity accumulates. In the heart of this philosophic people the philosopher has indeed extinguished all of that disquietude which racks men, but so often causes them to rise higher. What matter? Situated as they are, they have the strength of those who know little, but who are certain of what they know. Their peace is a little stupid, no doubt; their absence of cares, their absence of dreams, has something that perhaps irritates one in course of time and is even unhealthful. But one reads in it such a

Kouan-Hiou (?) Lohan, painting (first half of the x Century). (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

certitude of honesty that one feels oneself attached to these men. They have given their singular expression to the moral life by studying the incessant struggle that takes place in the depths of human nature and by realizing that it has its origin in the aspiration toward higher levels. The strange thing is that we should see beauty in that struggle itself and that the Chinese should find it in the victory his ancestors won for him in ages past. He expresses his obstinate, unlyrical enthusiasm for those who gave him repose of conscience for all time. And it is the weight of that repose that we feel in his art.

Therein lies the mystery of this soul which is complex on its surface, but infinitely simple in its depths. It achieves a science of form so sure that it can carry the grimace of its logic to a point that we should call impossible; but it can also attain to essential and profound beauty when it is lit up by a flash of emotion or when it is confronted with the necessity of constructing a durable and immediately useful work. We must not allow ourselves to think that their artificial parks are lacking in freshness and silence. We must not fail to see that the whole Orient is in the torrent of strange flowers they cultivate there. They gather into their triumphal symphonies the color of its coral reefs strung with pearls, its sumptuously figured silks that display the red or blue of the heraldic dragons on the imperial yellow which is strewn with flowers of dark and gleaming enamel. It is, indeed, the whole Orient that they give us: the rising and setting of its hosts of powdery stars in the clearness of rain-swept skies. Neither must we allow ourselves to believe that Chinese architecture lacks science and solidity. The fact that the most ancient examples of it do not date much farther back than the tenth century is due to the fragility of the materials. To protect the buildings

from heat and rain, the Chinese know what slope and what projection to give to the roofs, which they support by combinations of demountable framework, as powerful and as light as the creations of nature. There is one thing that they know especially well, and therein they are like the Romans, nay, more, they are like all the ancient peoples of the massive continent in which great summits alternate with great deserts, and great forests with great rivers: they know how to give to their work the appearance of style. Whether an airy or a heavy style, it affords invariably a firm and sublime base on which to rest our certitude of having achieved our aim completely. We find this appearance in the utilitarian edifices of the Chinese, in their bridges, triumphal gateways, and gigantic arches, their battlemented ramparts and the immense walls that inclose the plains and climb the mountains. Like the old sculptors of the valley of the Nile, they have animated the desert with avenues of colossuses, whose modeling is so vast and so summary that they seem to be installed in the solitudes for all eternity; the undulation of the sands, as they spread out to the buttresses of the mountains, seems gathered up into their structure, and the sphericity of the sky as it spans the circle of the plains.

IV

If, at about the time that Marcus Aurelius was sending embassies to China, there had not been the strange essay at sculpturing the walls of the temple of Hiao-tang-chan with flat silhouettes that look like shadows on a wall, or if we had not begun our acquaintance with certain archaic figures that date back at least to the beginning of our era, we might still believe, as we did for a long time, that not a stone had been sculptured in this land until the conquerors of the

northern provinces had, in the fifth century, introduced the moral contagion of the religion of Buddha. Here, as in the Indies, we find mountains hollowed out and rocks submerged by the great wave that rose from hearts filled with hope to overflowing. When the flood had receded, it left behind it colossal figures with pure faces and lowered eyelids, seated giants whose two hands lie open across each other; palm branches and fans are waved over the processions that pass with mighty rhythm across the walls of the temple, ten thousand gods, smiling, silent, and gentle live in the darkness.[1]

The cliffs, from top to bottom, were sculptured, the walls of every rift in the rock became alive, the glow of the spirit descended from the pillars and the vaults as they were hewed out along the lines indicated by the accidents of their projections and their hollows. A hundred sculptors worked in the shadows to complete the summary modeling of some gigantic statue; and such was the unity and power of the creative energy which animated them, that the divine monster seemed to issue from two hands and from one intelligence; it seemed the cry of love that a single breast prolonged

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[1] The monolithic temples of Ta-t'ong-fou, of Long-Men and of Kong, were discovered by M. Edouard Chavannes in the course of his admirable and fruitful explorations in 1907. I thank him most warmly for having authorized me to reproduce the innumerable photographs that he brought back with him, and of which I have been able to reproduce only a few because of lack of space. (Note to the first edition.)

Also, thanks to Charles Vignier, I have been able to recast completely the illustrating of this chapter of the present edition. It is to him that I owe the information concerning origins and chronology which has permitted me, as far as possible, to get a fresh estimate of Chinese archæology, a subject that is barely advancing beyond its embryonic stage. I hope that this rare spirit will pardon me if I do not venture to use the ordinary formulas in expressing my thanks to him. The distant and slightly ironic character of the Chinese sages has exercised so charming an influence on the education of his sensibility that he must not hesitate to recognize a reflection of that influence in the very affectionate sentiment entertained toward him by his unworthy pupil in Sinology.

Li Kouei-tcheng (about 910). Children playing on buffaloes, painting. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

across the ages. And it is here perhaps that Buddhist sculpture attained the supreme expression of a science of light for which there is no equivalent elsewhere, even among the greatest sculptors. The light does not seem to mingle, as in Egypt, for example, with the planes of the statue in order to render subtle its passages and profiles. One would say that it floats round the statue. The form seems to swim, to undulate in the light, like a wave that passes without beginning and without end. But we have here a specifically Buddhist quality, shared by this school of the northern conquerors with the statue makers of India and Korea, of Japan, of Cambodia, of Tibet, and of Java. It is held in common by all the representatives of this strange international school of Buddhist sculpture, in which the Greek influence is always manifest, through the nervous purity of the Occidentalized profiles, the harmony of the proportions, and the manner in which intelligence sums up and idealizes objectivity. China proper did not share fully in the faith which the invader from the plateaus of central Asia brought within her borders. Doubtless, it was but for an hour that she consented to abandon herself to the supreme illusion of the promised paradises. The most meditative, but, perhaps because of that, the least idealistic people in history had consented only against its will to go with the current that swept all eastern Asia and gave it that impersonal, secret art, of a spirituality so pure that ten centuries passed before China had freed herself from it.

To tell the truth, it was in this land that the wave of Buddhism lasted the shortest time. China reverted quickly to her habits of positivist meditation. Buddhism, with its brief climax of love, was still to give a greater depth and weight to her thought, as happens on the morrow of a passion tender and too clear-sighted.

She turned again toward death, and as the men who had hollowed out the mountains under her eyes had taught her to bring out of chaos the architectured form on which the light and shade paint the spirit of life, she was able to give to the funeral chant which she sang for a thousand years, from the seventh to the sixteenth century, a plenitude and a gravity of accent that had been forgotten since the days of Egypt. There is a heavy, categorical strain to it as of a settled thing — like the final conclusion of an intelligence that has turned round itself in a complete circle without discovering a single fissure through which doubt could enter.

Sung Art (960–1260). Water lilies. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

Certainly, we do not find in the funerary statues of China that secret illumination which mounts from the depths of the Egyptian colossuses to unite, on the plane of their undulating surfaces, the mind of man with the light. The Chinese people, as the masters of their soil and their culture, never suffered enough to

seek inner liberty and the consolation for living in a constant hope of death. They looked on death with placidity, with no more of fear than of desire. But the fact that they did not lose sight of death gave to Chinese positivism a formidable importance. Meditating on death causes one to see essential things. The anecdote, in which one loses oneself when one is concerned with the adventures of life, leaves the mind forever. The things that interest and hold the majority of men cease to fetter the mind, which realizes that it passes like the daylight between two flutters of an eyelid, and that in the light of this flash it must seize the absolute. And because it perceives nothing beyond life its hymn to death gathers up and confides to the future everything that is immortal in life.

Funerary sculpture increased in grandeur as the power of China increased, and decreased when Chinese power began to wane. From the time of the T'ang tombs to that of the Ming tombs, from the dynasty that represents China at its apogee to that which marks the end of the period, the red and yellow desert that runs in slow waves to the distant mountain chains where copper and iron repose—the desert of China saw the rise of massive forms: men, elephants, camels, rams, horses, and ostriches; some are standing, some lying down—all are motionless and on guard over the sleep of the emperors.[1] The whole plain was a work of art, like a wall of decoration, and the sculptors used the curves, the projections, and the perspective of the plain to give value and accent to the giants of stone. They were seen advancing from the horizon, marching like an army, climbing the hills, descending the valleys, and when they had once arisen for their march

[1] These tombs of the first great dynasties, from the seventh to the eleventh century, were discovered also by M. Edouard Chavannes in the course of his exploration.

LEANG ART (X Century). Children playing, painting. (*Langweill Collection.*)

or parade, they heeded neither the grasses nor the briers that began to grow again as soon as the hewers of images had disappeared. They followed one another

Iron Pagoda of K'ai-fong-fou (XIV Century).
(*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

and gazed upon one another; and the crouching lions witnessed also the passing of men laden with tribute —now hidden, now revealed by the undulations of the soil. Separated, absolute and definitive, the lone and silent multitude of forms rose up in the dust, under the

sky, as if to bear, to the ends of the earth and to the time when the sun itself should be burned out, the formidable testimony that man had passed this way.

Vault of Kiu-yong-kouan (XIV Century). Bas-relief.
(*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

Starting with the tombs of the T'ang dynasty, from the powerful, bas-reliefs that remind one of an Assyria visited by Greece, the Chinese sculptors, already possessing the most direct vision, condense their science gradually to arrive at a more summary expression.

Under the Sungs they were able to conceive an object as a mass so full, so shorn of details and accidents, so heavy and condensed, that it seemed to bear the weight of thirty centuries of metaphysical meditation. Thenceforward they could permit themselves all the stylizations, all the deformations, all the audacities needed for the affirming of the moral truths revealed to China

Wall of Glazed Brick of Ta-t'ong-fou.
(*Ed. Chavannes Mission.*)

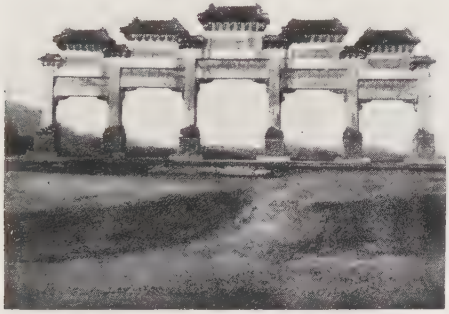
by the sages of the ancient days. Under the Mings, at the moment when the artists were about to lay down their tools, when China, then only marking time, was about to let Japan slip from her embrace, to rush into the life of freedom and self-conquest, the Chinese had acquired an imposing virtuosity. They cast enormous iron statues to guard their temples. They decorate walls and vaults with strange figures that form melodic lines undulating in curves which, while irregular, are

as continuous and rhythmic as the ripples on the surface of the water. Along the colossal avenues, the grimacing monsters and the chimeras alternate with the massive elephants, the dromedaries, and the warriors as straight and as pure in line as towers.

Thus we reach the same conclusions whether we study this race in the forms farthest removed from the realism of the early ages, or whether we consider the sculptured stones that best recall the living masses one sees outlined against a dusty plain at the approach of evening—the real domestic animals, the herds, and the caravans: we may seek in one type of art as well as in the other for the center of the Chinese soul. It is a soul devoid of imagination, but so firm and so concentrated that it is not impossible that its motionless realism will one day drive back the upward-looking idealism of the Occident and impose itself on the Western races when they have become eager for repose. Chinese art is an immensity. The art workman plays a role in China that is as important in the life of his people, and as permanent, as in Egypt. For thirty centuries he peoples the dwellings of the living and the dwellings of the dead with furniture, carpets, vases, jewels, and figurines. Three-quarters of his production perhaps is still buried. The valleys of his two rivers constitute a mine of art that is doubtless as inexhaustible as that of the valley of the Nile. Also, the forms that it yields vary to as great a degree—from the grave or terrible to the charming, from the pots of bronze that the Chinese buried for centuries so that the juices and minerals of the earth should slowly give them their patina to the swarms of "Tanagras" that issue from the necropolises. These latter are less picturesque, certainly, than their Greek sisters, but they are also purer and more summary; they are conceived with more fleeting contours, more decisive

NANKING. Stone elephants.

planes, and rounder masses, and they offer a more touching homage to feminine grace, chastity, and majesty. What matter if this infinite art seems paradoxical at first sight? As in the case of that Egypt which at first appeared so monstrous, we are beginning to perceive here the simplicity, the unity, the grand coherence of the strangest conceptions. Under the



Tomb of the Mings (xv Century).
Triumphal Gateway.

grimaces of the statues, under the complicated robes that cover them, under the outlandish cornices of the architecture, the bristling masses of the varnished monsters, and the flaming of red and gold in the sanctuaries, there is present a real and indestructible principle of construction. Sculptural modeling, which is sinuous and balanced among the Greeks, a thing of movement with the Indians, and rectangular with the Egyptians, is spherical with the Chinese. Under the ornaments and the symbolic attributes, under the most disordered coilings and twistings of the monsters, the passage and the plane of the sculptor penetrate each

other in a slow and continual progress, as if to produce a closed block. In its essential examples, one would say that this sculpture causes form to rise slowly to abstraction, that the abstraction descends slowly toward form, and that lightning flashes from the two as they fuse, eternal, compact, and pure. At such moments China, like Egypt, Greece, India, and the France of the Middle Ages, attains one of the summits of the mind.

V

The spherical unity of the modeling, which expresses the immemorial soul of China, is the image of its substance. By its configuration, by its soil, by the race that peoples it, the Middle Kingdom is a unit. China and the Chinese form one agglomerate thing in which the moral and the social solidarity, the passivity and the impersonality of the crowds, cause their inmost being to become a mere extension of the country itself. It is a yellow mass without contours, composed of the dust and clay of the land: the age-old dust that is brought by the north winds and that whirls in never-ending clouds across the disk of the sun, and the clay carried along by the rivers to cover the earth with their deposits; the dust and the clay are mixed into plaster for the walls of the houses, and the houses, again, and the men with their yellow skin which continues the soil, merge into the entity which we call China. The yellow earth goes to the very heart of the cities, and the perpetual exchange of misery, of dirt, of provisions brought in by the caravans and the river traffic, gives to the whole mass, and to the life that runs through to its depths, a slow, compact movement that never leaves the circle which it first followed. The horizon is as closely limited as the life, and all the

space and all the duration of the world cohere and are one.

An agriculturalist, or rather, a gardener—for ten thousand years, perhaps—cultivating his square of earth with slow patience and solicitude, accumulating

Tomb of the Mings (xv Century). Triumphal Way. Monster.

human fertilizer for it, getting his food and the food for his family and his beasts out of the smallest space, always bending over his soft soil and often living beneath its surface, his whole skin, his feet, and his hands impregnated with that soil—the Chinese knows its weight, its consistency, its degree of moisture and dryness, its very taste. He hears the dull murmur that stirs it when seed is sprouting. One would say that his whole sensual imagination has concentrated in the desire to handle that unctuous earth and the substances that he takes from it, the fat jade, cornelian stone, crystal, agate, chalcedony, the hard stones whose spots he knows how to utilize, whose veins he

knows how to follow, the kaolin and the flint, the white earth, the copper and the tin that he melts together to produce his black bronze. He knows his material so well, he is acquainted to such a degree with its habits and customs and peculiarities, that he can melt or

Tomb of the Mings (xv Century). Triumphal Way. Elephant.

boil it by holding back or by forcing the fire, so as to render it more or less hard, more or less brittle, to vein it, to mix it with other materials; he causes powdered metal that has been liquified by heat to flow through it, or breaks its surface with a crackle. His brass is deeply mottled with the green gold that he runs through it, with yellow, red, or violet gold, and with irised blues that have an appearance of danger, like sleeping waters. As he works his brass, weighty, dense, sonorous, and hard, the metal flattens and swells and takes on the aspect of solid blocks; the incrustations on its rough outside, with all the interlacings of slimy skins, of spines and tentacles, still leave its heavy profile intact and pure. His bloated dragons aroused by the rum-

bling and writhing of the sea monsters, his snails and his toads swollen with pustules, are brought from within the metal by *repoussé*, and with so sure a stroke of the hammer that the creatures seem to adhere by their own viscosity. The Chinese artist grinds coral

Painting. (*H. Vever Collection.*)

and turquoise into an imponderable powder that he may melt it again and compel it to flow between narrow bands of copper or of gold, and in the enamel made somber by flame his deep blues, his mat greens, and his dull, opaque reds form flowers of blood, thick leaves, and the shining, golden plumage of the birds. On porcelain, finally, he defines his gifts as a painter, for they had never been quite able to become a part of their own time and free themselves from the calligraphic processes to which they adhered in the monasteries.

When he reaches porcelain painting, the Chinese can incorporate the color with the paste and with the glazes of vitrified silicates, and in strokes as fine as cobweb or as broad as petals he projects upon the object to be decorated his childlike gardens, his lakes, brooks, and cascades, his kiosks and bridges, his butterflies and dragon flies, his beloved and well-fertilized countryside that blooms under the spell of his science of the sky, the winds, and the crops; there are rain-washed azures, there are flocks of birds swept along by squalls, there are clouds, flowered branches, reeds, and aquatic corollas. Here is the flower, here the insect; all the living tissues are here—the wing, the stamen, the antenna, the pulverulent pollen; all the moods of the air are here—its unfathomable transparence, its sudden opacity, its infinitude of shades from dawn to night, from the shower of rain to the dust, and from the pale moonlight to the red of the sun. Against the moving background of the blues, the greens, the reds, the pinks, the yellows, the violets, the whites, and the blacks, he sets the varied stage on which are performed the painstaking, concrete, and monotonous labors of those who cultivate the soil. If he desires to present clear daylight and smiling gardens, his painting is as if drenched with dew, it is as fres has a water color, and it is sharply outlined against the beautiful glazed and translucent backgrounds. If the cloudy sky blackens the surface of the waters, then the branches, the leaves, the dragons, and the landscapes arise from infinitely opaque depths and are seen vaguely, like mosses and plants through the water of a spring. And if a sumptuous evening is the subject which the ceramist has in mind, he lets the flame of his furnace creep over the sides of his vase again, and the variegated enamel gleams amid its wall of gold.

Brass and terra cotta take on the sheen of great, ripe fruits armed with thorns and ready to leave the branch. How heavy, how subtle, and how pure is Chinese form! One might say that it is less a material form, despite its heaviness, than a crystallized sound. The strange, positivist people! without an ideal, it still hears, in the depths of its obscure soul, this clear music. In the cylindrical form, the ovoid form, or the spherical form there is always the circular rhythm of China. Will China always turn in a circle, with the same patient, indefatigable, and slow effort which permits her to keep up the movement that is her salvation and to live without advancing? Or will she break this circle and adopt as her ideal the constant renewal of herself at the crest of the mounting waves of things? Will she not attempt, in this incessant pursuit, to gain the illusion of freedom? It is probable. She is stirring. Her five

Ming Art (xvi Century). Divinity offering lichens and chrysanthemums. (*Charles Vignier Collection.*)

hundred million men are going to be swept into the movement of the Occident; they will break our painful, age-old equilibrium, overturn the economic rhythm of the globe, and perhaps, in their turn, impose on us an immobility that they themselves will require a thousand or two thousand years to regain. We know nothing. The complexity of the present and future world is a thing beyond our grasp. Life rumbles, life rises. It will yield up its forms to the men yet to be born, that they may be consoled for having been born.

View in Japan

Chapter III. JAPAN

I

APAN, fifty years ago, had not emerged from a social state which recalls that of the Middle Ages. The Daimyos divided up the empire into a few great hereditary fiefs. Between them and the peasants was a warrior caste, the Samurai, and a priestly caste, the Buddhist monks. Above was the Emperor, whom no one perceived, the mysterious intermediary between Heaven and men—and the Shogun, the real chief of the political and military organization, having powers of life and death. To bind the whole fabric together was the steady aim of the Japanese. Here, then, is our mediæval society in its entirety—less sincere and better policed.[1]

[1] It is this mediæval character, retained by social and political Japan until the end of the nineteenth century, which decided me to place this

When the revolution of 1868 caused the feudal system to fall like a piece of stage setting which had

Buddhist Art. Lacquered wood. (*Louvre.*)

concealed from Western eyes the true nature of Japan, the Occident was astonished at the speed with which

entire chapter, as also all the others treating of the non-European arts, in the volume devoted to the Middle Ages, which should be looked upon as a state of mind rather than as a historical period. It is to be observed, however, that Japanese individualism tends, from the fifteenth century onward, as in the Occident, to detach itself from the religious and philosophic synthesis which characterizes the mediæval spirit.

Japan assimilated the external form of the European civilizations. At a bound it covered the road that we had taken four hundred years to travel. The Occident

Buddhist Art. Buddha. Wooden statue. (*Louvre.*)

could not understand. It thought the effort disproportionate to the means and destined to failure. It took for servile imitation the borrowing of a method whose practical value Japan could appreciate before

she utilized it, because old habits of artistic and metaphysical abstraction had prepared the mind of the people for Western ideas. Under her new armament of machines, of ships, and of cannons, Japan retained the essentials of what had constituted and what still constitutes her strength — her faith in herself, her controlled passion, her spirit of analysis and reconstruction.

The reproach addressed to Europeanized Japan is not new. She had been accused of acquiring from China —and through China from India—her religion, her philosophy, her art, and her political institutions, whereas she had transformed everything, recast everything in the mold of a savagely original mind. If one were to go back to the sources of history, one would not find a single people, outside of primitive tribes, to which another people had not transmitted the essentials of its acquirements. It is the wonder and the consolation of our human nature. By this solidarity, which rises victorious above all the wars, all the disasters, and all the silences, everyone who bears the name of man understands the language of man. Chaldea fructified Assyria; Assyria transmitted Chaldea to Persia and, through Persia, stretched forth its hand to India and to Islam. Egypt educated Greece, Greece animated Italy and, across the Middle Ages, guided the modern Occident. The Middle Ages of Europe rejoined the Arabs, through Byzantium and the Orient. China, which had felt the contact—by way of India—of Egypt, of Assyria, and especially of Greece—China carried over all these mingling forces to Japan that the latter might make such disposition of them as the teachings of her soil and her passion should dictate.

When, at about the time of Europe's conversion to Christianity, Korea transmitted Buddhism to Japan and with it the philosophy and the art of the Chinese

Kobo Daishi (IX Century). Wooden statue. (*L'Art du Japon, publ. by Brunoff.*)

and the Indians, the island empire occupied the same position that Dorian Greece did in relation to Egypt and western Asia. Silent, as early Greece had been, Japan did not know, any more than Greece, that she would have found the traces of her ancient life if she had sought the formless statuettes in her tombs. Although Shintoism deified the forces of nature, it had proscribed images. This was doubtless a matter of dogma that was foreign to the soil of Japan and that came, like Buddhism, from one of those ethnic elements —Mongol, Malay, or Ainu—which contributed to the formation of the race. It is certain that Japan accepted it only half-heartedly. As soon as Buddhism had opened its sanctuaries to all the Shinto gods, and fixed their look in bronze and wood, the Japanese recognized the image of their real desires in them.

But so long as the original materials of the race cohered, its artists did not free themselves from the need of Korea, from the immemorial will of the Hindus and the Chinese. The seated gods with the lowered eyes and the open hands are like a block, round and pure and modeled by the light. The spirit that inhabits them flows from everywhere and envelops them in solitude and silence. One feels them as bound up with space, and from all points they seem to gather its vibrations into their fluid surfaces. Are they Japanese, Hindu, or Chinese? They are Buddhist. It is but very slightly that religious sculpture begins, in the eighth century, to reveal the silent germination of the true national sentiment. The development is seen in the work of Kobo Daishi, the old statue maker. In his statues of warrior gods, so radiant with energy, there is something of *arrested* gentleness and of *arrested* violence which is already purely Japanese. He will not surrender his self-control. Whatever his fervor, his anger, and the impulse of his heart, the Japanese,

Priest of the Tendai sect (about the x Century).
(*From The Kokka.*)

when he has attained his true nature, will dominate the expression of these feelings.

Even when men think they are the masters of those decisions which seem freest, it is their general and unreasoned needs which dictate those decisions. When Japan closed her ports, at the hour when the Fujiwara came into power, it was because she wanted to grasp

Toba Sojo (xii Century). Painting, detail.
(*L'Art du Japon, publ. by Brunoff.*)

in herself the meaning of her own effort, amid the merging currents of the military migrations and maritime exchange. This people does not barter either its power of withdrawing into itself or its power of expansion. As soon as it perceives that it is too much cut off from the world or that it has been too active, it bends all its strength to dissipate rapidly the need for repose that had succeeded action, or of the need for action which it gathered from repose. It starts out on new roads with such a frenzy that it must suddenly stop to retrace its steps and, turning its back on the horizon, take an inventory of its conquests. In the ninth and the seventeenth centuries, it forbade the foreigner to enter its harbors, once in order to assimilate Buddhism

and again to study in itself the deep echoes of the Mongol invasions and the first incursions of the Occidental navigators. And it arrives at the decisive stages of its creative genius at a moment about equally distant from the time when it closed itself in and the time when it reopened.

II

The archaism that followed the first closing and the classicism that followed the second both developed in the same atmosphere of quietude and work. The political life concentrated in a single capital, Nara for the Fujiwara, Yedo for the Tokugawa. The people, which had been warlike until that time, confided the care of its defense to the military classes, so as to exploit the wealth of the torrents and the coasts and to clear the soil in security. And the sudden peace produced its usual harvests.

Half-effaced symphonies remain to us from these first ages of intellectual concentration, in which Buddhism, shared but very little by the people, shut itself up in the monasteries in order that their silence should enable it to illumine the old silk kakemonos. And through these works Japan saw within herself the rise of her veritable realities. At the moment which is summed up by the work of Kose Kanaoka, for example, we find a hieratic art full of the spiritual radiance of Buddhist painting; and this is paralleled by the appearance, in the somber harmony, of its reds and blacks, of the gold of the backgrounds and the aureoles, to give a warmer patina. But the new problems—those of the idea and those of technic—offer no more than temporary obstacles to the nascent spirit of the Japanese in its manifesting of a vision that was already more direct, more incisive, and clear-cut than that of the artists of the continent. Those three obscure and very

Statue of the Jingo Kuago (x Century). (*From The Kokka.*)

slow centuries, when the artists are held in the archaic mold, do not yet, to be sure, permit the Japanese spirit to free itself, since the monastic life in which the intelligence is at work is closed to the life of movement, to what brings enjoyment, to what brings suffering, to what brings understanding. But sometimes, when the

Daibutsu of Kamakura. Bronze statue (XIII Century).

monk quits the cloister, when he comes into contact with the pine forests, the torrents, and the dark seas, prodigious flashes of light bring before his eyes—with a clearness that perhaps is not to be found elsewhere in history—the extreme scope of his genius when freed from limitations. Toba-Sojo, the painter, and Unkei, the sculptor, are already true Japanese. The one has quite left the temples; he roams the woods, collects the insects, and spies on the mice and the frogs; he accords to all the beasts a clear-eyed and joyous friend-

ship, and thereby sees them repeating in their own way the gestures of men—which he finds very diverting. The other, to whom the last sculptures of the Buddhist grottoes of China offered a pretext for releasing the unknown forces that slept in his race, suddenly carries his disciplined violence into the brutal effigies of his warrior divinities.[1] The vision of Kobo Daishi is quite realized with these furious, simple statues—almost pure, but with an inward impulse toward murder and combat.

Between these two contemporaneous works—that of the painter and that of the sculptor, who are so different in aspect—there is, therefore, only an apparent conflict. They meet at the point where the individuality of the Japanese frees itself from the statue maker's art to affirm itself in painting. The abstract art of the metaphysical systems which are present at the origin of every great civilization was drawing to its close. Unkei is the last of the great sculptors. Sculpture, the religious and hieratic art, which always corresponds with a well-defined society, could not survive the feudal anarchy that preceded the Mongol invasion. In proportion as the remembrance of the teachings from abroad was obliterated, the great traditions declined in the monasteries. Civil wars rent the country. Religion lost its original freshness to become an instrument of political domination. While, to the eyes of the people, the Mikado still represented the old Shintoism of their ancestors, the Shogunate, supported by the pretorians, was opposing Buddhism to the traditional cult. Sculpture obeyed the laws of dissociation

[1] M. Edouard Chavannes has already indicated the analogy that exists between the statues of Unkei and the guardians of the gates of the grottoes of Long-Men. See figures on pages 67 and 113. The evidence is clear. How did the Japanese sculptors come to know these colossuses? Doubtless it was because China exported bronzes and wood carvings that were directly inspired from them.

UNKEI (XII Century). Guardian of the temple.
(*L'Art du Japon, publ. by Brunoff.*)

dictated by the state of society. It overloaded itself with incrustations, complicated itself with draperies, and, when it lost the calm of its lines, it lost the whole of its spirituality. It is only in the seventeenth century, when the painted wooden effigies of monks were erected, that among the severe profiles united by

Sesson (died 1495). Dragon. (*From The Kokka.*)

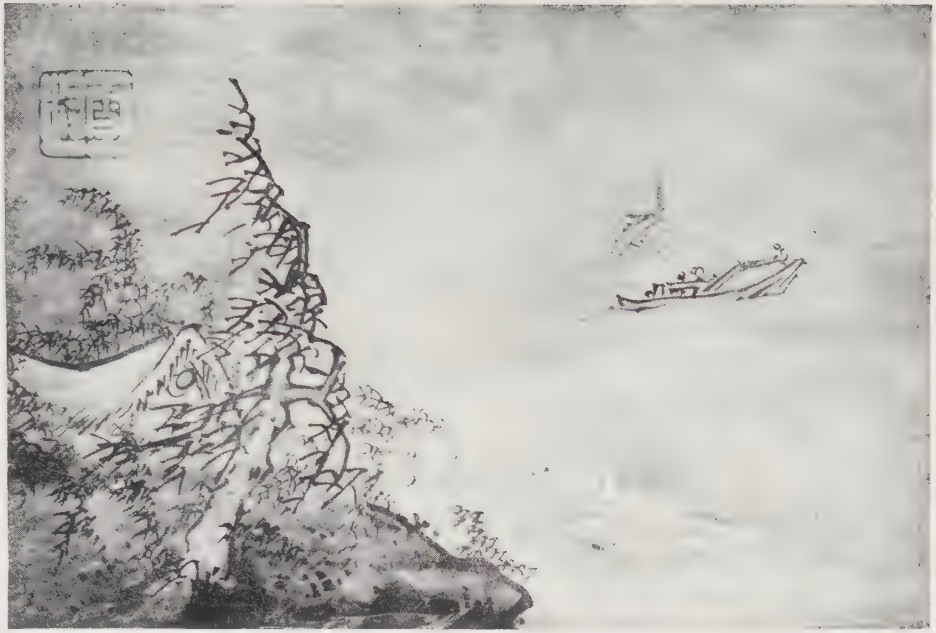
fleeting passages which envelop them with strength and security, the sculptors found again a little of the radiance of the seated Buddhas whose peaceful countenances had for eight hundred years bent over the faithful, and whose fingers, raised in their pure gesture, had taught them wisdom.

Painting, on the contrary, would not have existed without the invasion. The Japanese soul, which had lost its basis of religion and to which Toba-Sojo had prematurely given a basis of popular life, was getting away from its course and becoming anæmic in the service of the nobles. With the Tosa school, founded in the thirteenth century by Tsunetaka, who claimed to represent the art of the ancient archaic master, Moto-

TAKAUBU FUJIWARA (Tosa school). Portrait (end of the XIV Century). (*From The Kokka.*)

mitsu, its tenacity very quickly degenerated into minuteness, its science into skill, and its fineness into preciosity. When it reached its end in the academic miniatures, in which the court people satisfied their puerile taste for antiquated things, the national spirit had long since been delivered of its atrophying influence. Japan was weary from turning about in the same closed circle, and, having been assailed by the Barbarians ever since her art had emerged from the monastery, being touched by the immeasurable life of the new ideas that invasion brought with it, she let herself go with the wind.

Toward the end of the fifteenth century, when old Kano Masanobu, impressed by the work of the Chinese Josetsu, founded the great school of Kano, he appealed to continental traditions in order to combat the narrow academism of Tosa. In so doing he was following the tendencies that his master, Shiubun, and Sesshiu and Soami and Sesson and Shiugetsu, had already manifested. It was the good fortune of Japan that the Chinese painters of the period were seeking to regenerate their vision by the patient and direct study of animals and flowers. They could inform Japan as to her true nature, tear her away from the religious symbolism for which she was not made, and make it possible for her to follow her individualization along the roads that Toba-Sojo had explored with so much audacity. But the strong discipline of China did not immediately permit the Japanese artists, happily for the development of their mind, to go as far as their astounding precursor. First, they learned the architecture of landscape, they gazed on their country with a religious emotion, they got the appearance of the rocks, the angular trees, the jagged mountains. A rolling murmur followed the reawakening to life, a rude hymn after the silence. Powerful poets of the



Sesson (died 1495). The Tempest. (*From The Kokka.*)

brush, like Sesshiu, Sesson, and Soami, covered their white paper with those summary black dabs of India ink which give us for the first time the effect of things seen in a mirror dimmed by having lain in water. We see cranes in a sky, ducks in a pond, or the strong lines of a landscape, misty, chaotic, and wooded. Sesson discovered in it fantastic apparitions, dramas of the air and of the lakes —wandering barks, birds at dawn half frozen on the branches, and trees lost in the fog; by his powerful abbreviations he announced Korin. Sesshiu seemed to live with the beasts and to share with indifference their implacable destiny. The violent life of the earth entered him like the breath of his nostrils; he was far from men and seemed to remember the gods no longer. In his somber splashes of ink he gathered up the central forces that issued from the soil of the shaggy, pine-grown hillsides, the sap that poured through branches, the blood that swelled in throats and bellies, the hunger that hardened beaks, the brutal flight that ruffled plumage, the terrible sim-

Sesson (died 1495). Bird.
(*From The Kokka.*)

SESSHIU (1438–1506). Landscape. (*From The Kokka.*)

plicity of natural forms in the presence of instinct, of space, and the wind.

Kano Motonobu, the son of the founder of the Chinese school, could now borrow from the continental painters practically all their subjects, their motifs, and their composition. At bottom there existed such an antagonism between the spirit of the islands and the spirit of the continent—the one resolutely objective and quite devoid of sentimental partiality, the other so often employing the aspects of the world for demonstrating and moralizing—that what Monotobu naturally transmitted to his pupils before all else was the profoundly constructive action of Shiubun and Sesshiu. He brought to his task the power for synthesis that only a predestined genius possesses, and, in him, archaic culture could not fail to establish, on an indestructible base, the powerful sentiment for nature that the Japanese people had been seeking for five or six centuries in the depths of its soil, in the seed that expanded it, in the torrents whose every pool it had explored—whose every stone it had lifted, in the trees of its forests which it cut down and trimmed for the building of its houses. Kano Monotobu saw how the birds polished their feathers in the morning dew and how the cranes stretched out slender legs as they sank earthward in their slow flight. Except for some sleepy creature of the air, its neck under its wing, its plumage ruffled by the cold of the dawn, nothing would be seen but the boats lost in fog and in space. . . .

III

This austere vision was very soon to be transformed. After China, there had arrived the world of the Moslems, of India and Persia, of the Portuguese and the Dutch. Japan had either to free her mind of the robust

education of the Chinese or else submit to them definitively and surrender her privilege of self-expression. The Kano masters, on the outskirts of the evolution of ideas, were turning the continental tradition into academic formula, little by little, also some of them—Eitoku, for example, a powerful poet of tree forms—

Soami (xvi Century). Landscape. (*From The Kokka.*)

unfold an arresting personality in the discipline they observe. Meanwhile, the live elements of the country strongly concentrated scattered energies in the growth of audacity and faith which followed the protectionist edict of Iemitsu, which again closed Japan to the outer world. In a movement analogous with the one that was taking place at the same moment in western Europe[1]—

[1] It is, moreover, remarkable that the intellectual evolution of Japan should correspond almost exactly, in its general directions, with that of the Occident. Its Renaissance is of the fifteenth century, its classicism is of the seventeenth, its art of pleasure and fashion is of the eighteenth, its landscapists of the nineteenth.

which was realizing its classic expression in France, in Holland, in Spain, and in Flanders at the same

MITSUYOSHI (Tosa school) XVI Century). Painting. (*Louvre.*)

time—Japan found the moment of equilibrium when the spirit, freed from encumbering ritual, became master of the new rhythm; it could then offer to the

KANO MASANOBU (1453–90). Fishing.
(*From The Kokka, vol. iv.*)

sleepy crowd a safe refuge for ideas ready to scatter over the rich future. A new architecture is to recreate the statue maker's art, and for two hundred years Japan will pour into it the resources of its flora and fauna; before the end of the period, the artists, by their ingenuity, will be compelled to develop from this architecture even the humblest arts of industrial ornament, which will be dispersed among the people, as the dust raised by the fall of the temple descends upon the plain. When, upon the order of the Shogun Iemitsu, Hidari Zingoro built the temples of Nikko, it was in the name of the whole race that this artist, who was an architect, a chiseler, a smith, a beater of copper and bronze, a master of niello, a wood carver, lacquerer, decorator, cabinet maker, and gardener, took possession of the inner realities that Japan was suddenly discovering in herself. These monuments, dedicated to the spirit of the national hero, Ieyasu, fixed in an epitomized and definitive image the desire of an entire people, which thereby freed itself so as to expand in every direction.

On this convulsive soil, where volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tidal waves have so often destroyed in a few seconds the great cities that lie between the mountains and the sea, the fall of stone walls would crush men every time that subterranean fire bursts through the crust of the earth. A construction of wood, set up simply, offered no resistance to shocks. And the sanctuaries rose amid the forests of cryptomerias and maples whose eternal youth they called upon to witness their unshakable fragility and to sustain their vigor. The temple is mingled with the forest —which enters into the temple. It is conceived like a picture. Often it leads the traveler to its gates by rows of smiling gods, covered with moss and little flowers, and stretching away on both sides of the road

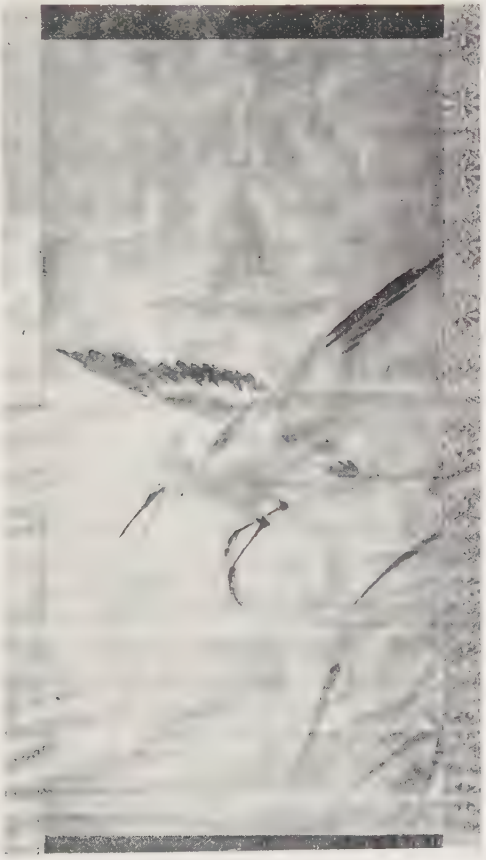
KANO MOTONOBU (1475–1559). Landscape.
(*From The Kokka.*)

to the horizon. Avenues of closely planted trees, black and straight, conduct one to the very stairways of the porticos. Among the horizontal branches hover the roofs of green bronze; the walls of red lacquer rise among the bare trunks; the somber verdure of the cedars continues through the winter to prolong the monumental harmony into the summer. If among the pines there are some clumps of chestnuts, of alders, or of oaks, the autumn will attune them with the creeping dragons of gold and the lines of gold that wind about discreetly with the ornaments of the cornices. The sound of the bells and the gongs mingles with the sound of the cascades and the sound of the moving leaves. The temple of bronze and of bamboo penetrates to the heart of the thickets, and if heavy trunks and broad branches are met on the way, they are surrounded by walls of lacquer so that they may dwell in the temple, in the center of the inner courts, whence their limbs will stretch forth to rejoin the forest.

And into all the halls, too, this somber forest enters, with all its flowers, all its trees, all its mosses, its springs, its birds, its reptiles, and the frailest and humblest of the insects over which each leaf is spread. Through red lacquer, through gold lacquer, through incrustations of metal, mother-of-pearl, or ivory, the forest spreads out its branches over the blood-red or black partitions that mirror the depths of the dawn or the depths of the night; it lets its petals and its pollen rain into the temple, it sends—flying, creeping, or leaping into the temple—its little beasts, innocent or mischievous, for whom every blade of grass serves as a refuge, which hollow out galleries in the subsoil and whose hum resounds in the sunlight of summer days. Nature is merely an inexhaustible reservoir, swarming with small living forms under the deep mass of the branches, and the artist of Nippon has only to

seek there at random to gather the things he uses to decorate the house of man or the house of the gods.

After this moment the Japanese artist no longer



KANO MOTONOBU (1475–1559). Painting. (*Louvre.*)

thinks of art as having any other function. Thus all the teeming life of the surrounding world is introduced, not only into the religious life of Nippon, but into its

everyday life. This is more important, for religion is only a wheel—though a necessary one—in the social mechanism. The life of the world is communicated to the Japanese by the kakemonos, the screens, and the bibelots which furnish his dwelling, the prints which pass from hand to hand, by the flowers embroidered on dresses, by the beasts incrusted on the scabbards and hilts of swords, on combs and on caskets. Only, it is not at random that he introduces this world into his wooden and paper houses. It would have broken down the partitions and torn the windows. He does not forget their calculated fragility or their rigid lightness when he lets in the outside world. He makes all the forms yielding and adaptable to the thickness, to the transparence, to the directions and the colors of the constructions and of the lacquer varnishes or the silks that cover them. He has *stylized* nature.

An erroneous distinction has often been made between the process of reason which consists in stylizing a form and the process of instinct which tends to idealize it. Idealization does not re-form an object; it reconstructs and completes it so as to deduce the most general, the purest, and most hopeful meaning that the object has for man. Stylization adapts it to its decorative function by systematizing the characteristics which appear in practically a consistent manner when the form is studied. The artist saw that all forms and gestures and all architectures in repose or in movement retained certain dominant qualities which defined them in our memory and which, when accentuated by schematic processes, could be applied to decoration with the utmost exactitude. By its power of stylizing the world, Japanese art stands as the most intellectual, if not the most philosophic, of our plastic languages.

School of Matahei (xvii Century). Painting. (*Louvre.*)

Stylization has never been an obstacle to the Japanese artist. On the contrary, it permits him to place his science at the service of a fantasy that knows no limits. It authorizes him to turn into geometrical

A monk. Sculpture in wood (XVII Century). (*Louvre.*)

forms the whole of nature, transposed and recomposed—beasts of silver, pewter, or gold; plants of red or black lacquer; gilded flowers, blue flowers, green flowers; leaves—red or blue or black; nights and days and suns that no longer retain anything of their original colors. But the rigorous logic which brings about order among the sensations out of which the

forms came little by little clothes them in another kind of reality, distant, crystallized, and magnificent. Their life exists through their relationships, the object is of no importance save with respect to the one next to it, and the higher type of truth is never in a fact, but in the way of understanding it and of uniting it with the other facts.

The miracle of this well-formed and precise language is that it allows the painters of the islands to retain a personality as clear-cut, as imperious, and as living as that of any artists of the Occident; the miracle is, too, that this language is neither transmitted nor repeated from century to century without contact with nature. Whatever science and certainty there is in his culture, whatever the power of his tradition, the Japanese decorator considers the visible world and takes counsel from it with unwearying enthusiasm. He is forever bending over it, and if he composes from memory so as not to retain anything of the moving form but the strongest appeal it had made to his mind, he does so only after having accumulated, like a collector of insects and plants, the tiniest details of knowledge of that form that he can get from thousands of close studies, wherein the bird lives again, feather after feather, the fish with scale after scale, the leaf with nerve after nerve.

IV

Never was any people more naturally an artist people, never did such a race draw on a field of sensibility, of enthusiasm and hope as rich as this one. As in Greece, all the aspects of the universe are gathered into a small space—mountains, lakes, forests, and arms of the sea that reach the heart of the land. As in Greece, an immensity of light glorifies the sea and

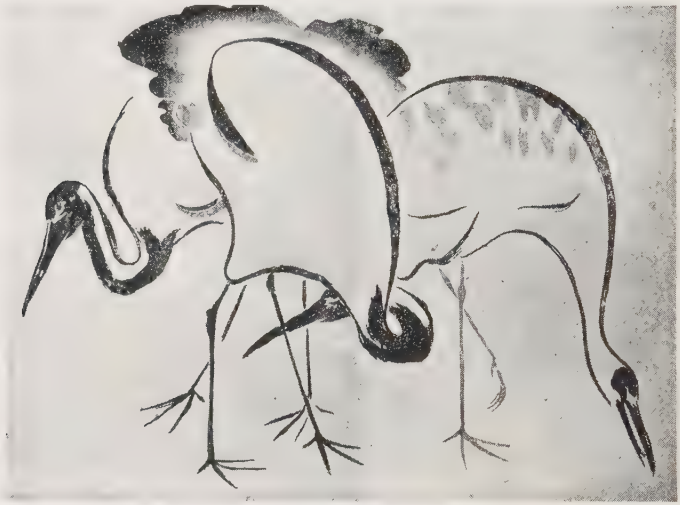
KORIN (1660–1716). Page of an album. *(H. Vever Collection.)*

the sky. More than in Greece, the spring deluged with flowers, the autumn with blood, the torrents carrying along the leaves or the petals which they sweep from their banks, all imprint the face of the soil with the sense of its inner life. All the climates to be found between Scotland and Italy follow one another, from the north to the south, in one continuous gamut upon which the identity of the geological formations imposes an impressive unity.

Not half a century ago, all the Japanese outside of the military caste were fishermen or peasants. Although their soil was hard to cultivate, it was fruitful, and they drew from it enough to feed themselves and, passing their whole life in this great, tangled garden where the tints of the horizon and of the flowers are so varied and powerful, living in the intimacy of the foliage, the snows, the cascades, the fruit trees, and the ever-resounding hum of the insects, they acquired a feeling for the forms and harmonies of the earth that penetrated them and was part of their nature, from the humblest of the serfs to the most powerful of the Daimos. Since the days of the Greeks, no other people in its ensemble was ever an artist to the degree attained by the people of Japan. Not possessing the power of illusion and the ennobling vision of the Greeks, to be sure, the Japanese still recall them in a great number of ways—in the seminudity with which they live their sturdy, healthy lives, in their optimism, in their tendency to deify the forces of nature and to deify human heroism, in the position of woman and of the philosopher-courtesans, in the masks of their theater, and in their sinuous and linear conception of form. It is the land where, in the springtime, husbandmen with their children and their women leave the fields and, taking with them provisions for a journey that may carry them twenty leagues from their village,

go to see the blossoming of the cherry trees at the edge of a torrent.

What is strange is how this people, always open to external sensations and thus always impressionable and vibrant, still remains master of itself. It resem-

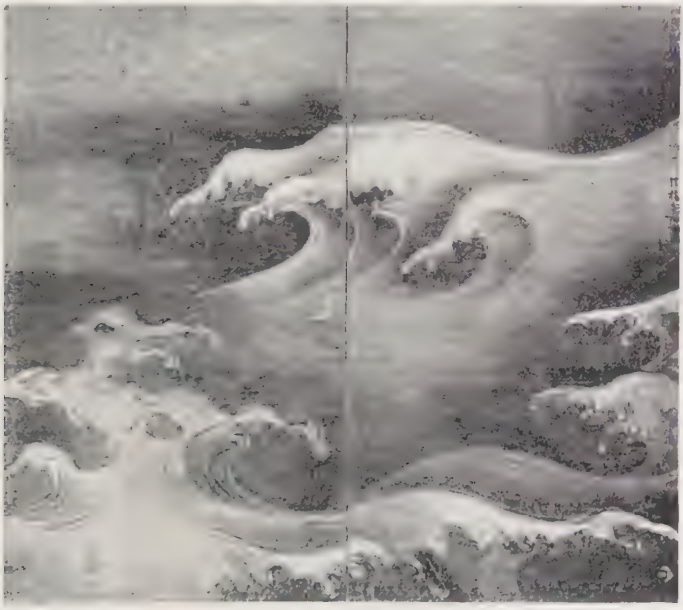


KORIN (1660–1716). Page of an album. (*H. Vever Collection.*)

bles its soil, whose gayety masks the subterranean fire which is always ready to send forth its lava from a hundred volcanoes. It is an affable and smiling people, and if it bursts into furious violence, there is always a methodical guidance for these outbursts. Even its anger is reasoned, its fearful bravery is only a lucid exaltation of its will. Its very emotion is stylized. And its art—whose flight it accurately controls, whose lyric impetuosity it holds in clear-cut, though sometimes abrupt, form—does not abandon itself to the overflow of the marvelous instinct which directs it. Egoistic at bottom, and jealous of keeping its con-

quests for itself, this people seeks to give only a transfigured image of them.

This is the only point held in common by Japanese and Chinese art, the two being as different as the indented, violent, gracious islands are different from



KORIN (1660–1716). The Wave. (*From The Kokka.*)

the continent in its massiveness, oneness, and fixity. From the one to the other there is the distance that separated Greece, the investigator, the lover of forms in movement, from Egypt—almost completely immobile and in love with full, subtle, and closed forms. To the degree that China is a single block, slow in movement, secretive, and heavy, Japan—nervous, tense in movement like the twisted cedars of its forests—

is mobile and ready for innovation. The ancestor worship, which the Japanese retained with the first ideas of morality that came to them from their neighbor, was not, as in China, a homage to the immutable, but the cult of the will power and the moral power with which the dead had endowed them.[1] Its effect may be seen in the love of the Japanese for children, who stand, in their eyes, for an accumulation of energy greater than their own, because the children see a larger number of dead when they look behind them.

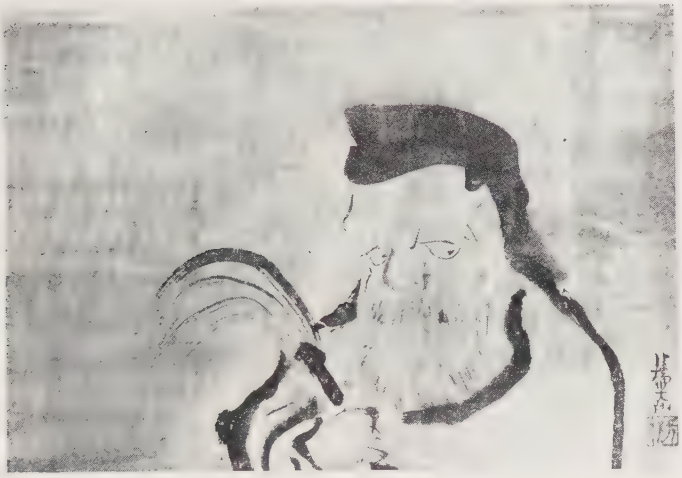
The world of the Japanese is a moving world.[2] The flowering of the gardens that they cultivate with a restless passion has in it something of this mobility, which we see also in the varying shades of their soil and in the profile of the mountains—which may change at any moment as the mists trail in tatters, now revealing, now masking the roofs of a phantom city, a lake, a dark stretch of sea spotted with white sails, a brilliant cone that starts up into the light, the forests of black pines, and the red forests of autumn. The soil may begin to tremble at any moment, and the twilight changes with the fire of the volcanoes. Japanese art will set itself to seize the characteristics of the object in movement, living, varying its place and giving, despite its practically constant form, the sensation of instability. It is as far from the mobility of impressionism, through which the modern Occident caught the variations of light with so much vivacity, as it is from the immobility of the Chinese. The Frenchman, working from nature and adhering faithfully to direct sensation, ended by losing sight of the characteristics of the object. The Japanese, composing from memory, sees nothing but those characteristics. With the former, analysis reaches the point of disso-

[1] Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro.*

[2] Lafcadio Hearn, *Loc. cit.*

ciation,[1] with the latter, synthesis reaches the point of creating a system.

The need of Japanese art to characterize things is so pronounced that our Occidental eyes cannot always differentiate between a work of character and a caricaturist's system. Caricature appears at the moment



KORIN (1660–1716). Portrait. (*From The Kokka.*)

when the descriptive element tends to absorb the ensemble instead of remaining subordinate to it. But how is that moment to be determined? Character and caricature oscillate around a purely theoretical point which all eyes do not locate in the same place. For a Japanese eye, doubtless, character continues after caricature has already begun for us.

What carries the Japanese artist beyond the mark, perhaps, is the ironical turn of his mind and, at the same time, his miraculous skill, which he does not

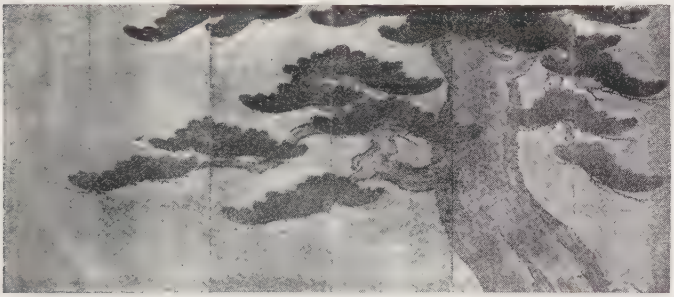
[1] With Neo-Impressionism.

sufficiently distrust. When, in a flash, he seizes form in movement, he gives an impression of infallibility, though one must hasten to add that this applies more especially to his representation of the smaller animals. Save in the case of Sosen, a savage and pure painter who lived in the woods like a wild creature, so as to surprise clusters of monkeys as they huddle together

Ceramics, enameled and fired earthenware, the piece on the right by Kenzan (XVII to XVIII Century). (*H. Vever Collection.*)

on great branches and shiver in the snow or the cold of dawn, the Japanese has not understood the larger animals so well as he has the smaller ones, for his eye is somewhat shortsighted and he does not easily grasp the idea of mass. He has scrutinized the microcosms so patiently and sagaciously that through them he has remade the world, as a scientist reconstructs it in the field of his lens. He has seen the sun behind a spider web. Beside him, the Occident, in its effort to bring everything to the level of man and to the general surroundings of his activity, seems to have neglected what is at the level of the soil, near our eyes, within reach of our hands—the things one can see only if one bends one's neck and stares fixedly at the same point,

only looking up to rest one's eyes after too prolonged effort. The Occident saw form and lines, certainly, and colors and their broad combinations, but it never saw a flower or a plant, it never studied the slight, curling lines on water or the trembling of a leaf. As it shut itself up in the house during showers, it did not see how the rain claws space nor how it bounces from the pud-



EITOKU KANO. A pine, screen. (*From The Kokka.*)

dles on the ground: and when it went out of doors again when the sun shone, it did not study the dust that dances in the light. But the Japanese has classified, as if in a science, the most secret revelations of his burning curiosity. His eye is a little shortsighted, he is very meticulous, he squats on his heels to tend his vegetables, to care for his flowers, to graft his bushes, and to make war on hostile insects. The life of his garden becomes the central theme of his meditation, which follows its ironical path through minute anecdotes and little concerts of rustling leaves. He has surprised the vast world in its humblest cares. He has visited the aquatic flowers with the sudden flight of the dragon fly, circled around with the bee from the hive to the glycine flowers, pricked the sugared fruit with the wasp, noted the bend of the blade of

grass beneath the weight of the butterfly. Under the wing shells, as the insect raises them, he has heard the transparent wings unfold, he has observed with passionate sympathy the tragedy enacted by the fly and the toad, and it was in watching the circular muscles roll in the flanks of snakes that he came to understand the silent drama of universal hunger. He has had long vigils over birds standing in melancholy on one long thin leg, and over their motionless intoxication with the freshness of the morning sun. He has seen them stretching out their necks in their rigid flights, and how they wink the round eyes that are flush with the sides of their flat heads, and how their spoon-shaped or pointed bills preen their varnished feathers. He has described the concentric circles that the water spiders make on the pools, he has discovered how the reeds stand waiting when the wind is about to rise, he has felt the agitation caused in gramineous plants and in ferns by the action of dew and by their proximity to a spring. And, having made all these tiny adventures a part of his life, he had only to raise his eyes to the line of the horizon to be filled at once with the serenity of the mountains in the light of the dawn, to feel peace come into his heart with the fall of night, and then to let his dream wander over the immobility of the distance or be cradled by the sea.

V

And here is a strange thing. Although, like the Greek sculptors, they saw around them nude human forms living and moving, the painters of Japan did not always evoke the human form more successfully than they did that of the larger animals, and it is especially when the human form is their subject that we hesitate to distinguish their need for character from their sense

of caricature. . . . Undoubtedly, they are moved on seeing the roundness of a woman's arm, or the curve of a breast whose purity seems molded in a cup of crystal. . . . The glory of the feminine body rises like a poem from the ardent Koriusai,[1] the painter of warriors and of

MORONOBU (1638–1711). Promenade, print.
(*H. Vever Collection.*)

virgins, to Kiyomitsu (1735–85), to Buntsho (?–1796), to Kiyonaga (1742–1815), the artists who so often remind us of the Greek vase painters—and to the great Hokusai himself (1760–1849), a man who could draw the fat expanse of the haunches or the globelike firmness of a bosom and at the same time could understand the upward thrust of the old volcanoes in the fire of the morning sun, or the rocking of the waves. Almost the whole art of the eighteenth century, here as in the Occident, was a voluptuous homage to the woman in love. Utamaro (1754–1805) is fervent in his

[1] Middle of the eighteenth century.

passion for the figures which he describes through the beautiful breasts that offer themselves like fruits, the high, hard necks under the hair that is combed upward, the oval faces under the jet-black masses of the hair that is secured by gold pins; Harunobu (1718–70), who is in love with the young girls he meets in the gardens and on the threshold of the paper houses,

Sword Guards. (*H. Vever Collection.*)

paints charming idyls in which he associates women and flowers and, through the discreet interplay of the effaced blacks, the burnt-out reds, and the pale greens, gives us glimpses of landscape in which lanterns light up the cherry blossoms that have come out under the snow. The art of these two Japanese would suffice to define the period. But the very strong, very sensual, and very gentle sentiment that even its greatest men had for the beauty of women did not often suffice to conceal the lapses in their expression. Occupied as they were in penetrating the structure of small things,

Masks. (*From The Kokka.*)

did they perhaps not have the time to analyze the human being? When they speak of him their language hesitates and floats, and formula appears. The feet and the hands, the arms and the legs, are singularly deformed and atrophied in ways that are not always very expressive; one finds them approximately the same among all the Japanese artists, as if one painter

Okio (1732–95). Young dogs. (*From The Kokka.*)

had transmitted to the other the patient and meticulous recipe for them.

In the eighteenth century these lapses of expression are rather surprising. The painters who spoke of woman with so ingenuous a love possessed, at that time, a science of line that bordered on abstraction. With Morikuni (1670–1748) and especially with Masayoshi (1761–1824) drawing is no longer anything more than a system, a linear arabesque that silhouettes the movement with a stroke. The powerful modeling of the old masters of India ink is barely suggested by the

undulating line whose black accents on the white page give only a slight hint of the succession of the planes and the flight of the contours. The mind of Japan was to evolve fatally toward this prodigious graphology which, by its own realization, satisfies the sensual needs of the imagination in the same way that it is satisfied by the crushed, tapering, or sinuous

Netsukes, wood and ivory (XVII and XVIII Centuries).
(*H. Vever Collection.*)

volutes of the beautiful ideograms. But both expressions lead rapidly to forgetfulness of the external world, to pure abstraction, and to death.

In the full expansion of the Japanese soul, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, the understanding of volume, which is to the language of form what philosophic balance is among the teachings of the senses, the understanding of volume by Motonobu or by Korin (1661–1716) enabled the painters to produce

their finest compositions. Even when linear arabesque alone filled the white page, even when the graded stroke did not indicate the density and materiality of things, even then their line was so fat and supple, with sinuosities and swellings that responded so well to the moving modeling of the external organisms, that it sculptured the form on the plane of the paper. To grasp Japanese art at the summit of its power we must look to the work of Korin. All the masters of Nippon, from Sesshiu and Sesson to Hokusai, live in that work, *in posse* or as a prolongation. And it comes just at the hour when Japan shuts its gates to descend into itself again and when, in a few years, the teaching of the primitives ripens in the meditative atmosphere of moral unity and of peace.

Masayoshi (1761–1824). Page of an album. (*H. Vever Collection.*)

The school of Tosa and the school of Kano united their conquests to form a definitive bone structure as a basis for Japanese sensibility. Mitsuoki (1616–91) exhausted everything precious and rare that the academism of Tosa could offer to the aristocratic soul of the nation. Tanyu (1601–74) employed his verve and his vigor to free Kano from its last servitude to the

Sosen (1747–1821). Monkeys, painting. (*H. Vever Collection.*)

Chinese. Itshio (1611–1724) struggled joyously against the Buddhist gods and was the first to go out among the peasants. Korin could drink at all the sources, break the fixed traditions to get back to the living tradition, and bind the new presentiments with the ancient realizations.

As a draftsman, he covered his albums with those powerful silhouettes, each one of which specifically incloses, in a swift line, the whole signification of the object synthesized, and, beyond the object, all the echoes that it awakens in the universe that we divine. As a lacquerer, he seems to do no less than reinvent an art which, for ten centuries, passed as the really national expression of the Japanese genius; he brought to fruition within himself the mind of the great lacquerer Koetsu (1557–1637), and created the great lacquerer Ritsuo.[1] His brother Kenzan (1663–1743), with Ninsei, the most powerful of Japanese ceramists, the man who could render the dampness of grasses and the freshness of flowers in the fire of his ovens, dipped into Korin's creations as at a natural spring. . . . As a decorator, he inspired generations of workmen who, a hundred years after his death, still came to ask him for motifs, for counsel, technic, and methods of stylization. When he let the India ink or the thick black varnish flow from the point of his brush, when he polished his lacquers of opaque gold with powdered charcoal, it was as if the whole ancient soul and the whole present-day soul of Japan were suspended within his soul to guide his hand. He had the power to seize, in the life that passes, the imperceptible instant that attaches it to eternal life. A few sparrows on the snow, a line of turtles, or a tuft of reeds sufficed him as a subject; a stroke, a shadow from his brush, and the

[1] Beginning of the eighteenth century.

absolute flows through his work. He seemed suddenly to abandon his color and his form when he had barely sketched them in, as if warned by a prophetic flash

HARUNOBU (1718–70). Young women at their toilet, print.
(*H. Vever Collection.*)

that he should go no farther. A leaf of his album took on the grandeur of a fresco.

Before transposing the reptiles and the birds and the

fishes and the little mammals and the aquatic grasses into his profound gamut of greens, blacks, reds, and the golds of his lacquers, he had so zealously penetrated the meaning of their animation that it seemed as if that animation was what caused the glistening material to swell. The rolling trot of the mice, the flabby appearance of the toads, the silent flights in the sky, and the undulation of seaweed at the water's edge passed under the glazed skin of his pieces. His heart beat at having understood the enormous force of life that is hidden under the grass we tread on, in the depths of the dark springs in which our gaze is lost, and under the broad leaves which spread themselves out and cast a green shadow. Gold on gold, gold on red, gold on black, red on red, black on gold, the lacquer incrusted with metals seemed, with its creeping forms, its wings, the flowered branches that traversed it, and the pollen of gold powder that rained on it incessantly, an ingot of somber gold in which life trembled.

It was from Korin that there descended upon the later time that wave, formed of the minor industries, which becomes an ever-broadening torrent, and soon gives to any practical object that comes from Japanese hands the character of a work of art. Korin, like every great artist of Japan, remains a workman, and every workman in Japan can become a great artist, whether he is a painter or a lacquerer, a bronze worker or a smith, a ceramist, a wood carver, a carpenter, a gardener, or, like Hidari Zingoro, Korin, and Kenzan, more or less of all of them at once. A close and vast solidarity unites, one with another, all the branches of the most flourishing decorative industry that has ever existed, and it was from the greatest painters that the humblest of the carvers or the engravers got all their motifs. We find in them the spirit of the masters and the same passion, the same skill, and the same

power of imposing on matter the direction of that spirit.

Before them, only the Egyptians, when they made the smallest objects, had had the power of giving the aspect of organic life to the minerals of the earth. The fired earthenware of the Japanese has the appearance of animal tissues, or viscera steeped in the sulphur of volcanoes. Their netsukes, the millions of intimate bibelots and mischievous trinkets of which they reaped a sudden harvest in the seventeenth century, are palpitating little things whose ivory, lacquer, or metal our fingers love to caress, as if they were tiny, warm animals hiding in the hollow of our hands. Capable of casting the largest bronze statues that the world possesses, seated colossuses whose raised finger and whose smile dominate houses and forests from afar, these artists have also embroidered in iron and cut it into lace. They found alloys, unknown before, which give to brass the veining of a marble; they mixed and harmonized the metals as a painter amalgamates and

Utamaro (1753–1806). Kitoki taking the breast, print in colors. (*H. Vever Collection.*)

grinds colors and assigns to each its part. Iron, the bronzes black or green, tin, gold, and silver, are orchestrated as in the processes of the print makers. Mother-of-pearl and ivory are associated with them, with the intimacy that the sky and the clouds have with the form of the earth. The old suits of mail, in which hammered copper and iron, lacquer and steel, are bound together by cords of crêpe and silk, look like great black scarabs. The Japanese have only to open their windows, and butterflies and grasshoppers, stamens falling from flowers, leaves torn from trees, and the broken wing cases of insects enter and fall here and there, wherever the breath of spring blows them—on paper fans, on earthen pots, bronze vases, lacquer scabbards, and iron sword guards. The fragile life of the ferns and the insects is mingled by the Japanese artists with social and family and military life. Even from pools of blood come little creatures of gold.

VI

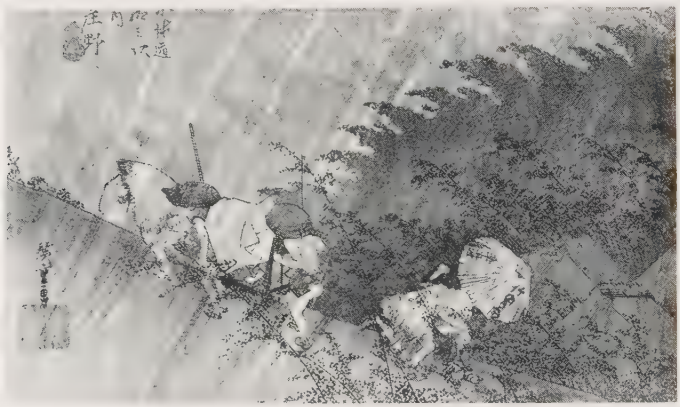
It was the period when art resolutely left the temples and the castles to overflow the street, as after the great centuries of Greece. It was the period when Matahei,[1] a direct, sumptuous, and rare painter, turned his back on dogmatic teaching and opened the way to that "low school" which expresses with the greatest evocative force, to Occidental eyes, the everyday soul of Japan. The genius of Korin, alone and free, the struggle of Goshin (1741–1811) against a half return to the Chinese school—favored by Okio (1732–95), the powerful portrayer of great wild birds—and above all, the appearance of prints, popularized by the severe harmonies of Moronobu (1638–1711) and of

[1] Middle of the eighteenth century.

UTAMARO (1753–1806). The Mirror, print. (*Louvre.*)

engraving in colors which was invented by Kiyonobu (1667–1729)—all this protected and helped along the activity of the school of the people. Netsukes, potteries, lacquers, inros, and surimonos were sold in every bazaar.

Prints invade the houses of the middle classes and of the common people. Views of the sea, of the moun-



Hiroshige (1797–1858). The Shower, print.
(*H. Vever Collection.*)

tains and the woods, the dresses of passing women, pennants, signs, colored-paper lanterns, the whole noisy, bustling, twinkling fairyland of the Japanese, permitted the engravers of the people's prints to expend, in miraculous profusion, the fantasy and power of their genius as colorists, dramatists, and story-tellers. Europe came to know Japan by this popularized art, by this infinite subdividing of the central force that Sesshiu, Motonobu, and Korin revealed to their country for the glory of man. It is not altogether the fault of Europe if, in unpacking its boxes of tea, its lacquer caskets, and its bamboo furniture, it hardly

saw more at first than the slightly comical exterior of the Japanese soul. For only the externals were at first conveyed by that rising sea of little colored papers on which stretched out parades of screen figures in epic posture; gnarled landscapes; warriors streaked

HIROSHIGE (1797–1858). Road of the Tokaido, print.
(*H. Vever Collection.*)

with blood; convulsive actors; bedizened, painted, pale women; and artisans, fishermen, reapers, and children—all a little droll—and multicolored, gesticulating crowds, and evening festivals on the waters. In that strange confusion the surprised senses of Europe could for some time discover nothing but violent colors and disjointed gestures, and it was only little by little that there came to be perceived a power of orchestration and a passion for characterizing things that carried a flood of revealing sensations into the Occidental mind. How should we, without Hiroshige, have witnessed the progressive illumination and darkening of the skies over the islands of Japan, how should

we have discovered the limpidity of the great dawns that come up over their horizon lines, the tall, bare trunks of the pines which shoot up from the Japanese roadsides, giving glimpses between of the deep azure of the air and the sea, the somber harmony of the snows, the mass of the waters which are almost black and against which white sails follow one another? He has shown us how the rainstorms drive the birds and bend the treetops, he has shown us the poetry of the blue nights of his country when the trees are in flower, and how its lakes are lit up by fireworks and the lanterns that dance above the wooden bridges; we see the crowded boats and the musicians that play in them. How should we have known Japan without the pure Utamaro who frequented the courtesans and stopped at doorsteps to see mothers giving the breast to their little ones; and without the trenchant Toyokuni, the boon companion of the actors; and without Shunsho, who spread the colors on his prints like streams of flowers; and without Kiyonaga, the reserved lover of the long feminine forms, the bare legs, breasts, shoulders, and arms that look out from amid the discreet harmonies of silk kimonos and half-lit houses; and without Harunobu, around whom women, like flowering reeds, enchant the earth; and without the infinite Hokusai, how should we have assimilated the value of the lines which, outside the realm of all scientific perspective, solely by their expressive force, symbolize the succession of the planes in unlimited space? How could we do otherwise than forget that they no longer knew Sesshiu, Motonobu, and Korin as their models when, to intoxicate our eyes, their flat tints shook out before us the folds and lining of the robes and combined them into orchestral harmonies? We see this clearly, even from our distance, as when one is on a height from which hollows and projections are

effaced, one discovers the design of a great landscape garden.

With flowers of green or blue, with flowers of flame, with red leaves and golden leaves, the Japanese embroidered robes in which the dawn rises or the daylight falls, and all the blood of the veins is spread out on them and all the snow of the mountains as it glares in

HOKUSAI (1760–1849). Iris, print. (*Private Collection.*)

the sunlight; the fiery clouds that float in the twilight are on those robes, and the fields veiled in mist—rose, mauve, or azure—and the fruits whose downy skin turns color as they ripen, and the silent rain of glycine petals as they fall on sleeping water, and the pink and white haze of the flowering fruit trees. Tossed upon the robes as the wind might toss them, the Japanese weavers and embroiderers have set frightened birds in flight, and into the folds they have twisted convulsive monsters. In the crinkling silk they have opened up landscapes where leaves and waters murmur,

and—as if seen through autumn foliage—the innumerable suns of the imperial chrysanthemum appear. The blacks, those deep and absolute blacks that almost always have a part in their designs, by the stripes or spots on cloths, or, in their pictures, by the note of the hair as it piles up in flat coils, or by the fat arabesque of the powerful ideograms, their blacks are the muted accompaniment against which the violent melodies shriek their drama and then grow calm and then re-echo and die. . . . When the women pass in procession across the prints of Nippon, we do not know surely whether the flowers, the dead leaves, or the whirling snowflakes on their silk kimonos were scattered there by the summer, the autumn, or the winter they have traversed—or whether it is not just the walk of these far-away creatures which spreads about them the summer, the autumn, or the winter. Everything sings when they come, even violent death. The landscape responds to them, the landscape with its pink branches from which the petals will fall like snowflakes, the landscape where the flowers resist the frost, the landscape with its limpid skies over serene waters, the nocturnal landscape where women—moving gardens in themselves—pass against backgrounds uniformly black.

The sap of Japan, in these millions of flying leaves, fell like ever-heavier raindrops, but also it got farther and farther from its roots. The country had been closed for two hundred years, deaf to the voices from without—and the voices from within beat against unscalable walls. Too long deprived of the opportunity for interchange, which is life, impotent to renew itself, its soul contracted into itself, grew enervated, and lost itself, little by little, in detail and in anecdote. Let us admit as much. The art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite the abundance in

which it spouted forth, despite its verve and its life, seems a little frail and troubled, feverish and caricaturish beside that of the preceding epochs. The

Hokusai (1760–1849). Drawing. (*Louvre.*)

great Hokusai himself, the protean poet, the man with a hundred names who filled more than five hundred volumes and twenty thousand prints with his thought,

"the old man mad about drawing," the distracted vagabond who gave its climax to the art of the people and scattered the spirit of Japan to the four corners of the heavens, as a great wind despoils the forests of autumn—the great Hokusai himself is an expression of the decadence. He has for his suffering fellow-creatures the unconcealed passion that was perhaps possessed, among us, by Rembrandt alone; he had that powerful minuteness that one finds only in Dürer, and that love of aërial landscapes in which Claude Lorrain and Veronese saw the tremble of their gold and silver; his verve—cynical or terrible or bantering or sinister or harrowing—is the same as that with which Goya tore from the world of forms the swift symbols of the tragedies of his heart. He has the immensity of knowledge and the skill of all the workmen of his nation. A pupil of Shunsho, a lover of Sesshiu, of Tanyu, and of Korin, there was not a fiber of his immeasurable spirit that did not root itself into theirs, to divide and spread in limbs and branches through all the beings and all the plants that he encountered during his very long life—when he roamed through the woods and along the streams, when he breathed the mist of the cascades or crossed some humpbacked bridge to follow the busy crowd till it dispersed in the streets, the gardens, and the houses. He spoke the humblest and the proudest word that has come from the lips of an artist: "When I am a hundred and ten years old, everything that comes from my brush, a point or a line, will be alive." He has described every kind of labor and told the tale of all the days. He did the things that the peasants do, and the workmen, and the fishermen, and the soldiers, and the people of the fairs, and the children. With a tenderness that is now merry, now quite pure, he has set down the story of their games, their trades, and their passions. He

has loved all women, their hard, pointed breasts, and their beautiful arms that flow in such swift, sure lines. He did not have time to tell us everything, though at any moment he would leave the people he was talking

Hokusai (1760–1849). The Rape, drawing.
(*H. Vever Collection.*)

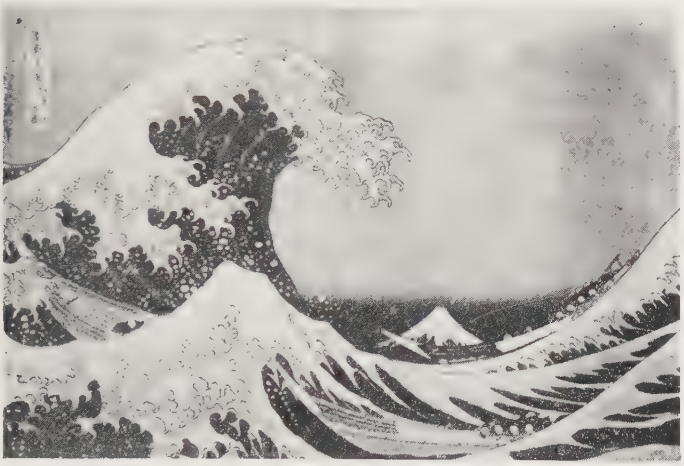
with —roofers laying their tiles, wood sawyers, or peddlers—to follow a bee toward a flowering hedge, over which he would discover a gardener at his work. He would lie down in the sun for his noonday siesta, but without any intention of sleeping; he would not make the slightest movement; he would hold his breath; at the slightest vibration he would raise an eyelid; he

would follow the buzzing spot until it had settled on his bare arm; he would let himself be stung so as to study the monstrous eye, the sucking proboscis, the metal corselet, and the thin elastic members that the insect is forever rubbing together. When he had gotten wet to the bone while looking so carefully at the rain, he

HOKUSAI (1760–1849). Drawing. (*From The Kokka.*)

was in haste for the wind to come and dry him so that he might see the whirling flight of the dead leaves, the lanterns of the festival, and the feathers swept from wings. If he climbed a mountain and came out above its low-lying mists, it was to get a sudden sight of some peak isolated in crystal space, and, as he came down again, to discover through rifts in the fog the thatched roofs, and the rice fields, and swarms of men under their round straw hats, and junks scattered over an opaque distance. When he had seen the pale moon rise in the black sky over a world empty of forms, he waited impatiently for the red sun to discolor the air so that he might seize the appearance of the world,

in the islands of gold spattered with dark touches that sow the inner seas, and the blue or red houses that appear amid the pines, and the wandering sails, and the conical volcano, now crowned with blood, now with silver or opal, now with the violet, the rose, or the lilac that one sees only in half-opened flowers. The oily oscillation of the sea, the glaciers thrusting up above the clouds, the motionless or restless tops of the woods



HOKUSAI (1760–1849). The Wave, print in colors. (*Louvre.*)

—the whole universe stamped itself on his mind in deep harmonies; he seems to crush blue, green, and blood-red jewels in an air that is filled with watery vapor and that transmits light to things. . . . He commands form like a hero, and at will he is lyrical or philosophical—by turns or simultaneously—and an epic poet and a satirical poet, living in the most frightful nightmares after leaving the most peaceful realities, or while still among them, and passing at ease from the most unhealthful invention to the noblest vision. . . .

And yet, through his swift art, analytical, feverish, and hurried—too anecdotal oftentimes—he is an expression of decadence. One is tempted to say that he foresees the end of Old Japan, that he wants to prepare a living encyclopædia of it, hastening to tell everything about it in direct, immediate notes that strike like lightning, as if to leave its image—complex, multiform, disordered, and immense—to the future.

After him Yosai still addresses a discreet, melancholy, and pure farewell to the kimono-clad women who pass before the backgrounds of flowered branches —and the end has come. The revolution that throws Japan into the path of the Occident brutally extinguishes its art life. It is like a wheat field laid low by the wind of cannons. And notwithstanding, Japan has yielded nothing, abandoned nothing of her soul. She has imposed on the world her right to her life. Now she must find, in the reserves of her silence, all her passion for comprehending and all her power for expressing. The soul of a people cannot die entirely while the people is still living. Already some of her artists seem to be reviving, to be finding again the spirit of their race, broadened and renewed by the thought of the Occident. One day, certainly a great art will be born of that meeting. But the present attempts are premature. Japan has a more immediate and more positive purpose to achieve now. After attaining military strength, let her, therefore, acquire economic strength. In the rise of the energy that leads to action she will surprise the creative spirit that will spurt forth one day. Later, she will be rich. Then poor. And the cycle will begin again.

Popocatepetl, Mexico

Chapter IV. THE TROPICS

I

ALL peoples feel the need, at some moment in their history, to come into that prolonged and fecund contact with the world of the senses from which there comes forth the verbal, musical, or plastic representation of the mind. But each one of them speaks its own language: thus a given people which has composed poems or orchestrated symphonies remains incapable of rising to plastic generalizations of a distinguishing accent. Outside of the French, the Italians, the Spaniards, the Flemings, the Dutch, sometimes the Germans I hesitate to say the English the societies of mediæval or modern Europe have left the industrial art of the people only to attempt imitations, more or less disguised, of the great foreign schools. Now all the races, even the most primitive, possess the faculty of decorating pots, carving wooden figurines, making furniture, weaving stuffs, and carving metal. That is to say that any people in Europe which has not, in the general onward

sweep of Occidental culture, known how to utilize the stammerings of these rudimentary arts, to make up a language of its own, a living language that expresses it in its highest desires, must seek to realize them otherwise than by images, which it does not know how to use because it does not love them. Besides, as civilization becomes universal, it perverts the needs of the people's soul, and the manifestations of that soul take on more and more of a mongrel character. To find a primitive art that retains its sap and can impart new and strong emotions to sensibilities that have preserved or regained their first ingenuousness, we must go to those peoples who have remained primitives.

AFRICA. Helmet (Guinea).
(*Guillaume Collection.*)

It is in the tropics or near the polar regions that men, in the heart of modern times, have preserved practically intact the spirit of their most distant ancestors. It is only there that they have not passed beyond the stage of naturistic fetishism and the grouping by tribes.

In one region the heat is too intense; in the other region the cold is too severe. Here the seasons are too distinct and too heavy; there they are too torpid and of too slow a rhythm. Among the peoples of the tropics, even the most rudimentary effort to get food and shelter is practically unnecessary, the effort to rise is too hard, and with the polar peoples the only use of effort is to secure an existence, which is vegetative and precarious, the nature of the country being too ungrateful for the inhabitant to imagine that he could modify his surroundings to his profit. Finally, neither in the one region nor in the other have any great human migrations passed, to renew the race, to bring it the breath of the world outside, because the course of these migrations has been turned aside by the ice, the deserts, the overdense forests, and the too-vast oceans.

Africa. Fetish of the Bakoutas, copper and wood. (*Guillaume Collection.*)

The black race is perhaps that one among the backward peoples which has manifested the least aptitude for raising itself above the elementary human instincts that result in the formation of language, the first social crystallizations, and the industries indispensable to them. Even when transplanted in great numbers to places like North America that have

reached the most original, even if not the highest, degree of civilization that we find in modern times, the black man remains, after centuries, what he was—an impulsive child, ingenuously good, and ingenuously cruel; as in the case of other children, all of his acts spring from immediate sensation. And yet his was the only one of the great primitive races which, inhabiting a massive continent in large numbers, lacked neither arms nor heads to modify its surroundings, discover new relationships, and create new ideas. But this continent is divided into twenty sections by the sands, the mountains, the brush, and the virgin forests; it is infested with wild beasts, it is feverish and torrid, and is cut in two by the equator. Its northern shores, those on the Mediterranean, are habitable for white men, and only these regions have, from the beginnings of history, participated in man's great movements toward the future.

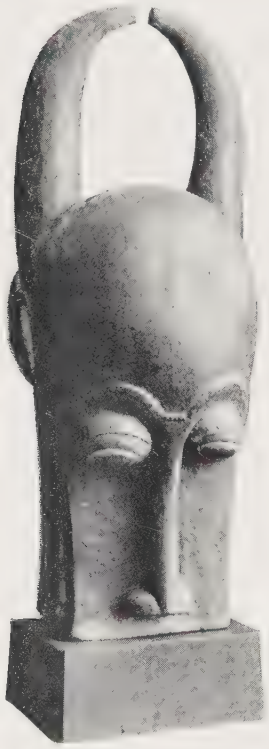
AFRICA. Bronze from Benin. (*British Museum.*)

However, if we revert to the earliest times we discover an Africa that was probably identical with what it is at this hour, and consequently on the same level with that of the tribes that peopled the north and the west of Europe—perhaps on a higher level. War and

AFRICA. Bushman fresco on stone. (*Copy in the Trocadero.*)

commerce created constant relationships between ancient Egypt and the Sudan, and Central Africa participated in the development of the civilization of the Nile. From that period on, iron was worked in Nigritia, while the old world hardly knew yet how to work in bronze, and the African jewelry that is still made by the Somalis of East Africa, the Pahouins, the Ashantis, and the Haoussas of West Africa, was brought by caravans from the confines of Upper Egypt to the markets of Thebes and Memphis. The jewelry is heavy, of a thick and compact material, with incrustations of blue and red stones whose opaque glow spots the circles of mat gold or of somber silver. Geo-

metrical figures are dear to all primitive peoples, whether they paint their pots, decorate their huts, weave their clothing, or stripe the skin of their faces or their bodies; and cutting into the African jewelry in every direction we find again these geometrical forms—short, fat, dense, and pressed closely together. As mathematics, the science of inert forms, preceded biology, so geometrical ornament preceded living ornament, and certain child peoples, incapable of interpreting life, have arrived, in ornamental art, at the highest degree of power. The human mind proceeds always from the simple to the complex, but when the great artist appears to unite the most differentiated living forms through a single arabesque, or when modern science tries to express all its conquests in mathematical symbols, the mind is invariably brought back to primitive sources, the very ones at which instinct slaked its thirst. The result is always the impressive agreement between the most obscure feeling and the highest form of reason.



AFRICA. Great helmet of the Baoules for the Gouli dance (Ivory Coast). (*Guillaume Collection.*)

In general, we need not seek, in the art of the Negroes, anything more than that still unreasoned feeling which merely obeys the most elementary demands of rhythm and of symmetry. When the youthful peoples follow

AFRICA. The Two Principles (Upper Niger).
(*Guillaume Collection.*)

the instinct which urges them to impose on the living forms that come from their hands a vaguely architectural appearance, an awkward, rough symmetry, they unquestionably obey an imperious desire for synthesis, but this synthesis is of the kind that precedes experience and not the kind that follows it. The sculpture in wood of the Negroes is still very far from the great Egyptian sculpture, for example, whose advent coincides with that of a social and religious edifice of the most powerful architecture. Perhaps it is a first sketch or presentiment of Egyptian art that we see in Negro sculpture—one which may carry us back almost as far as the appearance of man in Africa. From such a beginning may well have come the sudden start for the ascent, through the long centuries in the great fertile valley where the black and white races fuse. Then, after the slowest, the loftiest, the most conscious stylization, after the art of the Nile has sunk into the sands, the Negro again prolongs the immobile inspiration of Africa until our own time. But to him we must not look for metaphysical abstractions, for he gives us only his sensations, as short-lived as they are violent—an attempt to satisfy the most immediate needs that spring from a rudimentary fetishism. And perhaps it is even because of his fearful candor in showing us rough surfaces, short limbs, bestial heads, and

AFRICA. Tribal fetish (Ivory Coast). (*Guillaume Collection.*)

drooping breasts that he reaches his great expressiveness. These sculptures in wood—black wood on which

POLYNESIA. Sculptures in wood. (*British Museum.*)

the pure blues, the raw greens, the brown reds take on a violence so naïve that it becomes terrifying—have a simplicity in their ferocity, an innocence in their mood

of murder, that command a kind of respect. Brute nature circulates in them, and burning sap and black blood. Although man is afraid of them, he cannot help recognizing and loving his impulses—rendered concrete in the crawling crocodiles and the crouching gorillas which are sketched by long strokes in the wood and which decorate the doors and beams of his hut or the sides of his tomtoms.

How are we to discover, in the confusion and the ebb and flow of the tribes and the industries of Africa, the stronger currents which would have led, without a colonization of the continent by the European peoples, to a conquest by the blacks of a more enlightened inner world? The Haoussas and the Ashantis, especially, devote themselves to all the basic industries—weaving, ceramics, iron-working, gold-working, embroidery, jewelry, and carving in wood and ivory, and those of the Negroes of the Sudan or of western Africa who yield to the current of Moslem propaganda have a presentiment, on coming into contact with the spiritual spark of Islam, of the existence of a higher life. They frequently surpass the Berber artisan in working metal and leather for articles of luxury. But we must go back farther into the past of this dark land—this land fertilized by blood—and find the traces of a need belonging to a still very confused but strongly affirmed æsthetic order, since destroyed among some of the African peoples, by the immigrations of other black men and the invasions of the whites. Among the natives of Guinea, Niger, the Gaboon, and the Ivory Coast, we find idols, dance and war masks, objects of daily life, and weapons whose prototypes undoubtedly date back to a very ancient period, perhaps an immemorial period, and these works bear witness to a desire for stylization that is not alone very accentuated, but also powerfully original. The plastic synthesis.

here, borders on geometry. The ensemble of the work is subjected to a kind of schematic rhythm which permits itself the boldest deformations, but always allows certain expressive summits of the object interpreted to remain. The kingdom of Benin, which was one of the first to receive the Portuguese navigators and in which there developed, doubtless about the end of the Middle Ages, the greatest school of Africa, had admirable bronze workers. By their powerful feeling for embryonic life they became very near relatives of the archaic Chinese sculptors, of the Khmers and the Javanese. They twisted black serpents together to make of the rough and scaly coils in which they writhe the supports for copper stools. Their pots often took on the aspect of a human head and with lines of great purity; other vessels were ornamented with strongly built rude, and very summary sculptures in which the familiar silhouettes of the dog, the lion, the cock, the elephant, and the crocodile are indicated, sometimes with a strong tinge of irony. At this period, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Africa seemed, moreover, to be emerging from its long nightmare. The Bushmen, contemporaries of the Negroes of Benin, peopled the south of the continent; far from the

POLYNESIA. Sculpture in wood. (*British Museum.*)

equator, the deserts, and the forests of Central Africa, they lived in a healthier climate where stock raising is possible, where wild beasts are rarer and game is abundant. They could, had they persisted, have given a decisive impetus to the mind of the Negro races. Living more often from rapine than from hunting, their nomadic and adventurous life multiplied their relationships with the tribes and the soil of Africa at the same time that it sharpened their senses and subtilized their mind. On the walls of the grottoes, where they hid the herds they had stolen, they have left frescoes of red ocher in which we see, living again, their hunts, their wars, their dances, and beasts that flee or march in line. The form is only an approximation, but the flat spot is vibrant, and the silhouettes, looking like shadows on a wall, march with a single movement—oxen that are pursued, antelopes climbing a slope, great gray birds crossing the sky.

II

It is the most interesting effort, doubtless, that has been attempted by primitive men since the days of the cave men of Vézère. But this elementary painting seems condemned to have no evolution, to disappear brutally. The warm waters that ended the glacial period obliged the reindeer hunters to flee from western Europe; the Bushmen dispersed on the arrival of the Kafirs, the Boers, and the English; and from day to day the colonization of Australia reduces the number of the aborigines who covered the rocks of the great island with black, sulphurous, red, and blue frescoes which testify to a generalizing spirit whose rudiments are perhaps less visible among the inhabitants of Africa than among certain peoples of Oceanica. Polynesian art, like Oriental art in general, would seem to tend

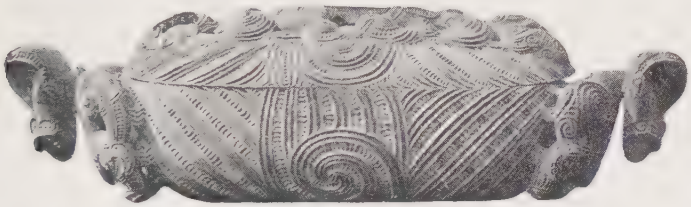
New Zealand. War mask. (*British Museum.*)

more especially toward decoration, whereas the character of the art of Africa, like European art, shows itself in a more marked tendency to isolate form in order to examine the activity it possesses within its own limits and within its individual characteristics.

It is true that the climate and landscape of Oceanica offer to the sensibility of the Polynesians resources that are not found in Africa. The dispersal of the race among the thousands of large and small islands, separated by vast expanses of sea, is perhaps the only thing which, preventing the necessary cohesion among the peoples, prevented also a great civilization from being born in the Pacific and from spreading round about. And now it is too late; the conquest of these regions by Europe, the diseases, the alcohol, the morality, and the religion that it brought them have made the Polynesians anæmic, have decimated them and overcome them. The time has already arrived when they are beginning no longer to feel in themselves the poetry of nature which surrounds them and which formed them.

The islands, whose flowered forests spring from seed brought by the wind, cover the blue ocean as the Cyclades of Greece strew the eastern Mediterranean from the promontories of the Peloponnesus to the bays of Asia. Nature is prodigious there—healthy, though sweating with its fecundity, surrounded by perfumes, bursting with flowers, dazzled with its fire-colored birds and its gleaming stones; its forests descend to the water's edge, where they are reflected in the cup of black sapphire incrusted with pearls, where marine monsters dwell in caverns of coral. A beautiful race of men, high of forehead and artists by nature, inhabits the islands; they live in the open air, in the wind from the sea, among splendid forms and the blazing orgy of the colors. The language of the race is harmonious;

dancing and war and music are loved, flowers are woven into crowns and garlands, and when the people gives itself up to love, it is still living with the springs and the sunlight. Its mythology is very near—through its triumphant grace, its perfume of the dawn and of the sky, and through its crystalline symbolism—to the old Ionian legends. Had life been a little less facile,



New Zealand. Wooden box. (*British Museum.*)

had there been unity among the people, a rich future would have awaited them.

The gods that the Polynesians carved in the soft material of their wood, to be erected on their shores or at the doors of their cabins, are in general more animated than the symmetrical silhouettes cut by the Africans. Perhaps their art is less ingenuously conceived and less severe. There is more tendency to style, it seems, but more skill, and at the same time less strength. The eye sockets, the lips, the nostrils, and the ears become, in the most interesting of these images, the point of departure for long parallel lines, sustained and deeply cut, for spirals and volutes which are the result of the effort to demonstrate religious ideas or to terrify an enemy in war; we find in them a profound and pure agreement between the spirit of the myth and its concrete expression. These are no longer dolls which are terrible only in their candor. They are violently and consciously expressive, with their attri-

butes of killing, with their cruel visages; and the colors that cover them are the symbols of their ferocity in combat and their ardor in love. Whether we consider the grimacing faces on the prows of the long curved boats, or the colossuses sheltered under the branches of the odorous forests—men or monsters daubed with vermilion or with emerald green—we find that all these works have passed the archaic stage represented by the statues of Easter Island, which is to Polynesia what an Egypt still plunged in the original mud would be to a lazy Greece, too much enslaved by the flesh. All are monstrous and alive, all have sprung from the bestial energy unchained by the wild loves and the excited senses of a country drunk with its bursting fruits, its multicolored bays, and the multicolored plumes that rain on it like the sunlight. Long ago, before the white man came to force his somber clothing on the people and to dry up their poetic spirit, the great wooden idols were sisters to the enormous flowers and the birds and the naked men who roamed the woods, tattooed from their feet to their foreheads, painted with red, green, and blue, and covered with great undulating lines that were arranged to bring out the forms, to accompany with their flashes the rhythm of the runners, and to accentuate the muscles of the face in their terrifying play of expression during moments of debauchery and cruelty.

Their purpose was to captivate women, to terrify the enemy, and, through an instinct even more obscure and vast, to play, in the symphony of nature, the role dictated by the great corollas hanging from the tangled vines which bind the giant trees, by the glossy coats of the animals, by the fiery wings, and by the sinking of the stars into the sea. All the primitive peoples of the tropics who go naked in the freedom of the light have, in this way and at all times, loved to paint or tattoo

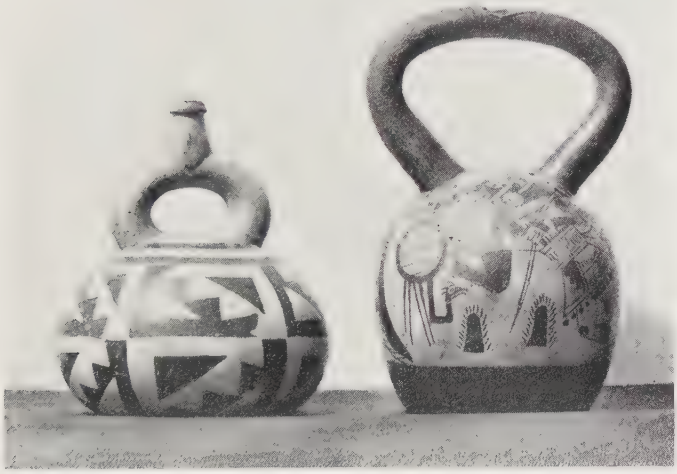
their skins with color—the Negroes of Africa and the Indians of America, as well as the Polynesians. But with the Polynesian, the tattooing takes on a brilliancy, and evinces a care for rhythm and life, that we find nowhere else, save among the peoples that derive from the nations of Oceanica or who have been in touch with them for a long time. For their geometrical ornament, the Japanese substituted figures of birds, dragons, chimeras, women—which are really pictures, through their movement and composition. The New Zealanders, if they preserved in their tattooing the geometrical ornament of their Oceanic ancestors, brought to it a precision, a violence, a will to style that would almost suffice to define them as artists if their plastic genius had not revealed itself by other manifestations.

Wherever they may have come from—the Polynesian migrations

EASTER ISLAND. Colossal sculpture, lava. (*British Museum.*)

across the Pacific have scarcely more of a history than those of the birds that wander from climate to climate—they retained the ardent sensualism that distinguishes the populations of Oceanica. Like the latter, they loved to set up posts sculptured with atrocious figures, and to decorate their weapons, the utensils of their industries and households, their boxes and vases, with incised painting that ostensibly is there to observe and perpetuate their traditional rites, their practices of exorcism and of magic, but that in reality expresses that human love of form, of line, and of color which inspires us to harmonize ourselves with nature, so as to understand it better and day by day to recreate it with its own elements. But a new and great thing was appearing among them, an art which indicated the rise of the Maoris to a decreasingly chaotic and a more luminous consciousness of their destiny in the world. It lasted until the English, in the middle of the last century, interrupted the development of the natives. They had practiced cannibalism, it is true, but only after they had entirely destroyed the rare specimens of the antediluvian species which still wandered through the silent forests at the time when their war canoes, ornamented with frightful visages, arrived in the great strange islands, which were devoid of all birds, of insects, of reptiles, and which possessed at most a few dwarfish mammals. The Maoris had been in the country only some three hundred years, perhaps, and it was with difficulty that they managed to organize themselves into tribes, which numbered some tens of thousands of men, and in which the births barely filled the gaps made by the massacres of prisoners of war who were offered as a sacrifice to the gods. And notwithstanding, their soul was already escaping from its silence. They had built villages in the center of which the fortified *Pa* contained the embryo of the

future city. Four or five communal houses sculptured from top to bottom, schools, museums of tradition and legend, temples, inclosures for sport and for assemblies in which sat the councils of administration and of war. The decorative forms we find here are always violent, to be sure; they tell of killing, they are red with blood



PERU. Painted vases. (*British Museum.*)

and contorted into infernal attitudes, but already they manifest a persistent demand for balance and for architectural rhythm. Must we not, therefore, see, as the dominating influence in them, the majestic landscapes where the activity of the Maoris took place and the effort put forth by the people to maintain that activity? They had passed beyond the dangerous region of the tropical zone. The perpetual spring no longer enervated them. Their islands, like those of Japan, ran the

gamut of climate from that of Italy to that of Scotland. They placed their villages beside the opal lakes set in cups of lava, that are surrounded by cold springs and boiling geysers, under the shelter of immense mountains

PERU. Vase, terra cotta. (*British Museum.*)

where active volcanoes alternate with glaciers that descend to the sea; and when the Maoris followed their pine-bordered streams they came upon fiords that reflected the forests and the snows in the shadowy masses of that southern ocean in which no human face had ever seen its image. A great civilization, a great art, could and should have been born there. The mats woven of

phormium, hanging at the doors of the huts, shone with burning colors; the rocks were covered with frescoes in which the blue of the ice and the lakes lived again; the villages, built all of wood, with their sturdy houses whose roofs have a steep slope and with their

Photo by Charles Sheeler

NORTH AMERICA. Horsemen, painting on hide.
(*Museum of the University of Pennsylvania.*)

palisades for defense, were works of art, deeply carved with horrible figures which were tattooed like the people themselves and framed in prodigious series of curved lines, of interwoven spirals, of rhythmical coils, thick and fat, whose calculated mazes combined into the form of the human face. From afar, these forests of sculptured wood had the appearance of the arborescent ferns, tufted and slender, which covered the country. There is a little of the decorative spirit of the artists of Japan, but it is more impetuous and barbarous;

quite disdainful of the material employed, it lacks that irony and that minuteness of observation which sometimes dampens enthusiasm. The character of the works is ferocious. Certain sculptured visages are of a structure so abstract and so epitomized that upon looking at them one is reminded of the greatest masters of form, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the archaic Japanese—and there is, besides, something austere and trenchant, a terrible purity that belongs to the Maoris alone.

Certainly, no other people among the Polynesians has reached so high a level. If there is, between the races of Oceanica and the ancient inhabitants of Easter Island, a connection dating back beyond the range of history, it is the Maoris upon whom we must look as the most legitimate inheritors of the line, for the art of the Maoris, as living as that of the Papuans and the other natives of the Pacific, aspires even more than theirs to realize those edifices of animated geometry which we can see as the goal of the hieratic art of the ancestral race. Its island, an extinct volcano, is deserted. But the rocks are dug out in hieroglyphics and figures of birds, fish, and men. Finished or unfinished, more than five hundred colossuses stand erect on the shores or in the center of the dead craters. They are terrible figures, massive and summary, holding their arms at their sides; almost without a cranium, they have bestial faces in which the nose is prominent and dilated and the eyes are wide open; the broad planes in which they are established look as if they were cut with an ax, but centuries, perhaps, were needed before the people could work the basalt of which the figures are made. Why are they there, horribly alone, with their faces to the eternal sea, and what do they mean if it is not our inextinguishable need to discover ourselves and recognize ourselves in

the rebellious or docile material that our soil furnishes to us? A seismic catastrophe must have interrupted the works and isolated them from the world. There are tools at the feet of the figures, but no other traces of humanity. Where did those men who erected them take refuge? Whence did they come? What unknown sources had slaked the thirst of these forerunners of

North America. Vases, painted terra cotta.
(*Ethnographical Bureau of the United States.*)

the strange races of Oceanica—with the Indo-Europeans, the most gifted of our planet, and antedating, perhaps, the peoples of Asia? They were the victims of their surroundings. The Polynesians had doubtless come from the Dutch Indies, but that was long before the period of history and previous to the time of the Indian civilizations. The present populations of the Dutch Indies, those Malays who also peopled Madagascar, have not the proud and strong grace of the Polynesians, nor their free life, nor their ardor in love, nor their artist mind with its ability to generalize.

The thought of the Malays is timid, their character indifferent; they accept the beliefs that their successive masters from the west bring to them. Their ancient art derives from the art of the Indians, their modern art does not go beyond the monotonous practice of primitive industry. It was doubtless through contact with the sea winds and through their ecstatic abandon of themselves to the great currents of the ocean that the Polynesians escaped from the apathy of such origins and were able to call forth the formidable dream that was interrupted, but whose enigma is offered to us in the giants of Easter Island. Who knows if they did not go much farther and, crossing the islands that have disappeared, carried on by the waves, if they did not bring their dream face to face with the eastern sun whose source was hidden from them by the fiery rampart of the Cordilleras? And did not a gulf open up behind them, perhaps, and swallow up the land of their birth, even within their memory?

III

One can believe such a thing when one tries to recover the trace of the old inhabitants of the dead island. Outside the art of the Polynesians nothing reminds one more of the spirit of archaic Oceanica than the hieratical forms found among the Aymaras of the Peruvian Andes. There, as in the Egypt of the Middle Empire, the architectonic formula seemed arrested. In exchange for the lands distributed to the Incas, their bureaucratic socialism doubtless exacted from them that blind and definitive submission of soul to everything touching the spiritual domain. The Aymaras had reached the point of no longer seeking anything more in nature than motives for ideographs, which they stylized with relentless insistence. Hiero-

glyphics, carved out and flat, and composite images in which vague human forms appeared among the precise and mysterious interlacings of geometrical figures, framed the monolithic gates of the temples and the palaces. Pizarro melted down and minted the silver and golden statues which the Incas erected to their heroes. Were they of a freer art? Doubtless they were. . . . The Quichua pottery of the same time bears witness to a charming popular spirit. These peoples were good. They loved men and beasts. They looked on them roguishly, but very gently. Almost all their pots, their bottles, their alcarazas for keeping water cold, had heads of animals as spouts, and arms or paws for handles, and the forms are unforeseen, sometimes beautiful; almost always monstrous, they are grotesque, contorted, blown up, crushed

Maya Art.
Honduras. Stele.
(*Museum of Natural History, New York.*)

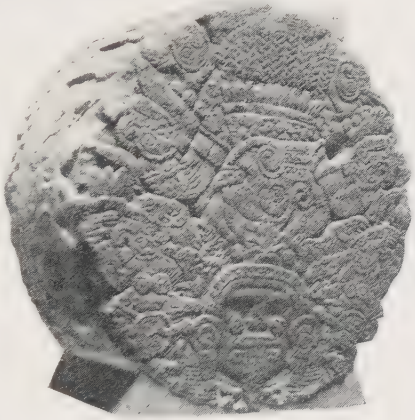
in, warped, or paunchlike. Egypt had also reserved the hieratic forms for the face of the sanctuaries, and spent her sorrow in the shadows where, like Peru, she buried her mummies. She also loved to give animal forms to her smallest objects, to finish off pitchers and jugs with the heads of cats, of panthers, of jackals, and

Mexico. Palace of Mitla.

cynocephali, even as the Peruvians drew out the tops of their vessels or flattened them down into the heads of dogs, of pumas, of ducks, and alligators. But in Egypt there was a purer and a loftier spirit. And if she was sometimes moved by her bent for irony, a very discreet and subtle tendency, she seldom went so far as caricature. Instead of heaping up her cadavers in earthen vases, she stretched them out in troughs of granite. She possessed the cult of form even beyond the grave, and purified the form to the point of abstraction. The wing of the mind had touched it—and our world was to issue from that contact.

But in Peru also there was no lack either of ingenious

social systems or of great dreams. Does not an Aymar legend show the creator peopling the earth with statues which he animates and to which he intrusts the mission of civilizing the world? In no other cosmogony is this profound myth to be found. The old Peruvian poets had felt that it is only when there is a contact between the soul and form that the lightning flashes, and that it is for the artist to introduce into the universe more order, a harmony which is forever evolving and which projects upon the future an anticipated realization of our hope. But the murderous climate and the debilitation of the people, who were decimated by the bloody sacrifices which the priests offered to the sun, upset the prophecies of those who sang the epic of the race and neutralized the best-intentioned sociological teachings. In that torrid and trembling part of America, the most gigantic efforts were to miscarry suddenly, upon the shock of contact with a superior civilization. For in spite of everything, the Spanish civilization was superior, despite the killing and rapine of its envoys and the Inquisition which they brought with them. These adventurers, coming from an old world where the human mind was boiling with the deepest agitation to which it had been a prey for fifteen centuries, these violent



MEXICO. The stone of the hearts. (*Museum of the City of Mexico.*)

madmen, who had stumbled against this continent in trying to encircle the earth, represented the conquest of the future against themselves.

They had only to touch a finger to the rotten fruit for it to fall from the old tree in which the sap no longer rose. In Mexico, even more than in Peru, the incessant ritual massacres had plunged the people into

Mexico. The plumed serpent. (*Trocadero.*)

a dull torpor that rendered them incapable of resisting the effort of the invader for more than two years. The sole remaining energy which they recovered was used to help Cortez in driving the Aztecs from Tenochtitlan,[1] which the latter had held under their yoke for two centuries. All things considered, the religion of Torquemada immolated fewer victims than did that of Montezuma. And for a thousand years, moreover,

[1] Aztec name for the City of Mexico.

such deep waves of men had been passing over this soil that there came over its ancient possessors an absolute indifference as to which master must be paid and to which god should have its tithes of gold and of blood.

Like the Dorians in primitive Greece, like the Teutons in the Italy that was the contemporary of the civilizations of Mexico, all the conquerors had come from the north—the Toltecs in the sixth century, the Chichimecas in the ninth, the Aztecs in the thirteenth. From what direction they had entered, whether from the Orient or the Occident, from Greenland or the Bering Sea, we do not know — from both directions, doubtless. We find all types among the present-day natives or in the old sculptures of Mexico: Mongolian Asia and probably Scandinavian

Mexico. Toltec column.

Europe are represented there, perhaps also the sunken Atlantis. The people had, doubtless, crossed the polar regions, carrying with them, in their migrations, some of those Inoits who still inhabit the shores of the Arctic Ocean and who are said by certain scholars to be the descendants of the oldest artist people of the earth, the cave dwellers of Périgord who moved northward with the cold. They had come into contact also with the nomadic Indians of North America, leaving some of their own people among them and taking with them some of the latter to the south. At some periods they had spent winters with the polar races, huddled in their squalid, ill-smelling huts, and, in the dim light, had, with the natives, given rhythm to the interminable polar night by preparing the apparatus for fishing, hunting, and command—the reindeer horn, the jaws of the reindeer and the seal, and whalebone which they engraved with images as precise as the memories of their monotonous life that recommenced each year with the return of the pale sun. At other periods, while moving down the Mississippi, they had drunk water, kneaded bread, eaten meats and fruits from beau-

The goddess of death. (*Museum of the City of Mexico.*)

tiful red vases with broad black spots, which sometimes give to the geometrical ornament the crude appearance of a beast or a bird. They had slept on the prairies under tents of hide decorated with childlike designs of hunted bison, demons, and fearful gods, which, in their violent coloring and their awkward drawing, united the most primitive of symbolisms with the most primitive of writings. In them can be foreseen the hieroglyphs of Mexican manuscripts and of Peruvian bas-reliefs, with their geometrical life and their harsh intricacies like those of a picture puzzle. With their faces hidden under horrible masks decorated with striped feathers, beaks, and horns, their bodies painted in violent colors and covered from head to heel with multicolored plumes which gave them the appearance of those monsters with crested spines that are found in the coal of the Rocky Mountains, they had danced the terrible war dances that center round the idea of death.[1] Perhaps even more distant memories moved within them; perhaps there lay in the depths of their minds some images of the sculptured rocks of prehistoric Scandinavia and through the thousands of years of their traditions they may have preserved, transformed by time and adapted to new climates, the primeval technic of building with wood which their oldest ancestor had brought from the plateau of Iran.[2]

In any event, the ruins which are so abundant in

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[1] The art of the polar regions and the art of the North American Indians, among the Eskimos, on one hand, and among the natives of Alaska, Vancouver, and the United States, on the other, still continues to-day nearly the same as it has always been. It seems to present the point of relationship with Mexican art — which would be the stylization attained after centuries or thousands of years — that the artistic industries of the African Negroes have to the great art of Egypt.

[2] Viollet-le-Duc, Preface to *Cités et Ruines Américaines*, by Désiré Charnay.

Yucatan all bear the trace of these things. The Maya conquerors, who constructed these edifices, probably before the arrival of the Toltecs and perhaps even at the period of the Greco-Latin civilizations, connect the American branch of the Aryas—through their pyramids built with steps on the outside and their buildings with sloping walls—with the Asiatic and European branches which had spread, in the earliest times of our history, over Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, Greece, and southern Italy. And in all the remainder of Mexico, which, in the Middle Ages, was covered with aqueducts, quays, piers, canals, bridges, reservoirs, stone streets, pyramidal temples, terraced palaces, and ramparts, the genius of the white peoples, more or less mingled, more or less resistant, persists—in great purity at times, as among the Yucatecs, or stifled, oftentimes, by theocratic formulas, as at Mitla, or thickened by black or yellow blood, as we find it when we wander on the plateaus where so many races are crossed, where Nature takes back everything to herself, where the woods so often cover enormous ruins that bear on their summit a temple of the Catholic god.

As in India, when one moves from the south to the north, from the confused intoxication of the sensualist peoples to the clear conceptions of the rationalist peoples, here, when one descends from the north to the south, one passes through every stage, from the façades bursting with complicated sculptures to the great horizontal bands—smooth or hollowed out into abstract ornament—which are supported by colonnades and cut by pure edges, as bare as the profile of the soil. From the calcareous plains of Yucatan to the cool plateaus of upper Mexico the way leads through feverish undergrowth, alive with serpents, scorpions, and poisonous insects—a place where the mind could

have been dulled by the weight of the noxious exhalations, the eye blurred by bloody mists, so that the various styles of building were fused, as the most bizarre fancies of theocratic pride were imposed on the architects. Primitive India, northern Europe, Asia, and America were mingled, even as their mythologies had been mingled, and disfigured, in the fierce soul of the old Mexican prophets. Nothing can express the burning restlessness of the soul of these peoples, who knew astronomy; who had divided the epic of humanity into four sublime ages — the suns of water, air, fire, and earth—which represent the struggle against the deluge, the cold, lava, and hunger; who sang the loves of the volcanoes; who adored the sun, the profound father of life, from the tops of the terraces, but who thought it necessary that the walls of the temples which they raised to him be always bathed in human blood, that it should rot on the burning earth, and that at the summit of the temples a Stone of Hearts should offer

The goddess of death.
(*Museum of the City of Mexico.*)

to the eagles the viscera of the human beings who were sacrificed.[1]

For Teoyaomiqui, goddess of death, for Huitzilopoctli, god of carnage, for Tlaloc, god of water, of forests, of storms, the god who regulated the warm torrents that streamed from the sky for six months, and for Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent that was already adored by the Toltecs[2]—from whom the masters of Tenochtitlan received art, the cult of the sun, and the thirst for blood—for all these gods new cadavers were necessary. To consecrate the temples of Huitzilopoctli at Tenochtitlan, eighty thousand prisoners had their throats cut. The bread offered in sacrifice was kneaded with the blood of children and virgins. Their hearts were torn out and lifted up to the god, the pools of blood that spurted from the severed arteries were carefully spread over the image of the god so that it should disappear under a mantle of smoking clots at the end of the ceremonies. Heaps of severed heads were raised as high as the pyramidal temples. There were sanctuaries where one entered through a mouth whose teeth crushed skulls and tore entrails and which one could not pass without walking in blood up to the knees. The priests flayed men to dress in their skins.

From the depths of this horrible red steam that rose everywhere, which got into one's throat, caused a nauseous poison to roll in the veins, and threw a veil over memory, how could the enervated and discouraged soul of the peoples have drawn the forms that sur-

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[1] I address my warmest thanks to M. Auguste Génin of the City of Mexico for the precious information that he has transmitted to me, when I have not found it in his beautiful *Poëmes Aztèques*. M. Briquet, the photographer at the City of Mexico, is also entitled to my deep gratitude for the zeal and disinterestedness with which he has placed at my disposal a great number of photographic documents.

[2] Toltec signifies "artist."

rounded them, the great laws of living structure from which there issued through Egypt and Greece the civilization of the Occident? Everything that was not death was hidden from the eyes of the people. Only when the sun was at its zenith did it touch the sculptured altar in the well that was hidden in the heart of the artificial mountain. The flat bas-reliefs with which the walls were covered and in which one might, under the brilliant varnish of the greens, the turquoise blues, and the reds, have seen men in plumed helmets hunting the tiger and the boa, disappeared under the blood. The vapor of the slaughterhouse masked the idols. The tradition of sculptured material could not be handed on to mutilated generations, and the landscape at which they looked too hastily was always steaming with rain or else vibrating with sunlight. It is by the intuition for mass, and not by intelligence in the use of profile, that one may compare the stone idols which the bronze tools of the Mexicans drew little by little from the block, with the pure Egyptian colossuses whose planes

God of the water.
(*Museum of the City of Mexico.*)

answer one another, introduce one another, and balance, as the land balances the sea.

The Mexicans scarcely reached and certainly could not go beyond the architectural stage in the evolution of the mind. Undoubtedly, the need for an essential symmetry haunts them when they raise Tlaloc on an ornamented pedestal, his hollow eyes turned to heaven, as he sits motionless with his prodigious expression of waiting and boredom, or when they represent Chacmool gathering the rain in his belly, or the goddess of death dressed in serpents and claws and raising her skeleton face and her horrible, rotted hands. In an effort that one feels to have been a painful one, they attempt the most trenchant expression and, to be sure, they do often attain profoundly moving structural epitomes, in a sudden equilibrium that arrests the tottering of the form and, with the energy of despair, sets it firmly in place. The continuity of the composite monster is then no longer, as with the Egyptian, in the progressive and fleeting undulation of modeling that flowed like a clear water. Like a tropical vegetation swollen with spongy bulbs, with spines and blotches and warts, the Mexican sculpture has its own continuity, as it continues sending forth its thick blood, from the torpid depths where the heart beats, to the fat projections—heads and other parts of reptiles, bare skulls, human fingers, and breastbones of birds that, at first view, seem to be caught there by chance. And yet the work does not break down under the load it bears, for it is brought back to organic unity by a summary but imposing architecture that enables it to retain its sense of mass, whatever the depth of the carving, and that is seen in its living ensemble more than in its abstract planes. Only, the frightful destiny of the Mexicans warned them that they would not have the time to arrive at the deepest meaning of the unity in their art,

GUATEMALA. The tortoise of Quiriga. (*Trocadero.*)

to rise into abstraction, to reach the idea of harmony. They say what they have to say hastily, in confused and violent visions, brief and fragmentary, a heavy nightmare of sadness and cruelty.

Mexico. Statue, lava.
(*British Museum.*)

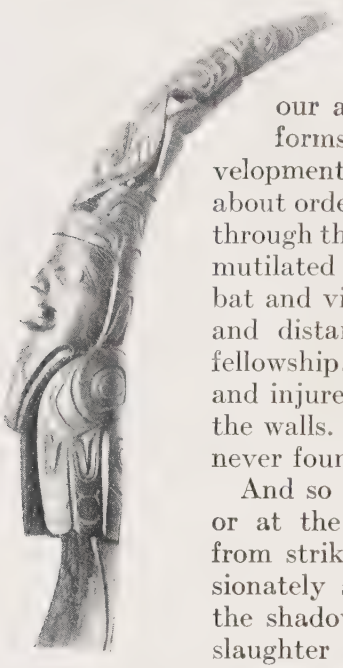
Even when they erect whole statues, when they abandon for a day their hieroglyphical combinations of geometrical figures and animated forms, one would say, from their manner of articulating the limbs and of giving an architectural quality to the masses, that they never saw anything but mutilated trunks, dislocated members, scalped heads, skinned faces with empty eye sockets, and grinning teeth. Life exists in these works only by fits and starts, broken as it is in their soul; it comes in brief tremors, and then is stopped short by dogma and by fear. In confused forms the sculptors combine sections of living animals, enormous pulpy masses swollen with turbid water and bristling with spines like the prickly cactus. In Central America, where the earth is soaked with the water of the hot rains, where the vegetation

is heavier, the miasmas deadlier, and the poisonous thorn bushes impossible to traverse, the dream is still more horrible. In the sculptured rocks one distinguishes nothing but heaps of crushed and palpitating flesh, quivering masses of entrails, faces from which the skin has been torn—a confused pile of viscera from the sides of which blood seems to run.

By what aberration of art, a thing made to unite mankind, did it occupy itself so exclusively, among these peoples, with the celebration of slaughter and death—as it so frequently did also among the most civilized peoples? Our hearts beat more regularly and more strongly when we follow the Assyrians into their mountains, when they strangle lions whose iron muscles grow tense and whose claws tear the belly of the horses. We unite as if for a prayer around the harmonious groups on the Greek pediments which evoke the terrible myths of Hercules, or the war of gods and man, on the centaurs and the lapiths, or the Amazons—works full of murder, of the blows of falling axes and of the flight of spears, where fingers clutch desperately at knives. The lines of soldiers on the arches of triumph of the Romans, the passage of the lictors, of the legionaries, of the somber imperator with his laurels, the plod of the captives, and the sonorous step of the horses fill us with calm and energy. We know on what heaps of cadavers the mosques and the alcazars are raised, with what bloody mortar their stones are ce-

Mexico. Chacmool. (*Trocaaero.*)

mented, and yet we love the cool of their shadow and their gardens. We even feel a powerful exaltation before the Indian monsters who drink blood and devour rotten flesh. It is because the spectacle of strength exalts our strength. It is also because we deceive ourselves as to the meaning of our acts and because we like the forms that are necessary to the development of our faculty of bringing about order and of comprehending, even through the composite monsters and the mutilated fragments, as, through combat and violence, we pursue an illusory and distant idea of harmony and of fellowship. We fumble in the darkness and injure ourselves as we collide with the walls. The gateway to the light is never found.



ALASKA (XIX Century). Handle of a spoon, slate. (*Museum of Natural History, New York.*)

And so we must look for it together, or at the very least we must refrain from striking down those who are passionately seeking it in the depths of the shadows. In Mexico, in Peru, the slaughter of the peoples was at every moment sweeping away thoughts that were necessary to the development of other thoughts, and so, one by one, the roots of the future were cut as fast as they grew again. If war can at times exalt and even reveal the creative energy of a people, systematic massacre extinguishes all energy. The arrival of the Spaniards in the New World, which brought the most implacable of the European races face to face with the most implacable of the exotic races, was a terrible con-

frontation and one that was providential in history. Spain, to whom the attainment of its unity had given a century of creative velocity, was, because of the Inquisition, to perceive the need that man has for man in order to realize himself. It was not to be long before the moral desert should reach across Spain, as it was beginning to reach across America when that land had made a material desert of itself by burning its cities and by throwing its broken idols into the lake of Tenochtitlan.

A medallion, enamel on gold. A saint. (*In the Svenigorodskoi collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*)

Constantinople

Chapter V. BYZANTIUM

I

BYZANTIUM carried along the world of antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages. As it guarded the gates of the two continents and the two seas, as it was at the center of the eddies of the fallen civilization, it fed its violent and troubled life with the slow death struggles of the ancient peoples. For a thousand years it defended, against the human inundations from the north, the east, and the west, the spirit of law that was Rome, the habits of trade, of politics, and of speculation of the Greeks, and the cruel luxury of the monarchies of the Orient.

The cult of wisdom would doubtless not have felt itself very much at ease under the cupola of Saint Sophia; Athens would not have recognized, in the stiff idols that decorated that church, the freedom of her religious naturalism, nor her respect for the living form in the atrocious mutilations that Byzantine justice inflicted on the condemned. The uncompromising

realism of Assyria would have found no savor in the images of the books of prayer, and the kings of Nineveh would not have comprehended the revolutions fomented in the hippodrome and the changes of government effected in the antechamber or the bedroom where the purple of the Empire was forever dyeing itself with fresh blood. The Rome of the Republic would not have recognized its legionaries in those fat soldiers

ROME. A repast, fresco. (*Catacombs.*)

cuirassed with gold; it would not have tolerated the continual retreating of law before imperial caprice or the intrigues of the eunuchs. However, under the fermentation of the vices, the orgy of the games, the cries of the massacres, and the convulsive autocracy that was obliged to obey the orders of the populace, the law of Rome was here, the opulence of Babylon, the curiosity of Athens—and the only focus of light in the dark night round about.

Christianity, which the Greeks of Rome were propagating in the night of the catacombs by means of the image, could not purify or extinguish the light that came from the roaring fire, which was burning away all that remained of the sap of the ancient world in the poisoned fruits. The crowds that had responded to

Rome. Portrait of a deceased person, fresco. (*Catacombs.*)

the appeal of the apostles of Galilee had rendered possible, through the renunciation of their revolutionary instinct, the coming of a social régime harder than its predecessor; and the Byzantine autocrat, in order to assure to himself their support, adopted the letter of

Ravenna (v Century). Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, interior.

the new order and enjoined the priests to change the names of their gods. That was all. The Sophists had misled the philosophic spirit. The Byzantine concilia codified sophism.

The schism of 1054, which separated the Church of the Orient from the Pope, was the consecration of the political schism which had been separating the Orient from the Occident since the division of the Empire. Each half of the ancient world, thenceforward, took its course alone toward transformation and recasting. The mold of Rome is offered to the barbarians at the

ALMENNO S. SALVATORE, (*Bergamo*) (V and VI Centuries). San Tommaso, interior.

risk of being broken under the pressure of their desires. Hellenism modified by Asia dominates the Orient through Constantinople until the Orient enslaves it through Stamboul. The orthodox icons are to represent the dying Greek idolatry as the Catholic icons, some centuries later, will represent Latin idolatry in its rebirth.

When we open one of those psalters that the Greek monks illuminated in the depths of their cloisters, between the sixth and the tenth century, we soon see it was of the dying idol of Greece that Christianity had asked the consecration of its own life. The whole history of the Jewish people is conveyed in these illuminations and takes on, under the names of the new divinities, the appearances of Greek mythology. David is Heracles when he fights, and Orpheus when he sings. The great goddess, with her beautiful arms, her beautiful face and breast, is always there in the idyllic landscape of the Alexandrian romances. At the time when Byzantium was young, Alexandria was still alive, and the growth of the one and the decline of the other mingle their voices confusedly. Asia, through Sassanian Persia, transmits to Byzantium the spirit of the high plateaus and the land of the rivers. But because of its Greek character, the city is above all sensitive to what the artists of the delta of the Nile have to offer it. They create the image of Hellenized Egypt—that profound portrait in which one looks into the limitless depths of the eyes that have lost their health; and with this revelation the Greco-Egyptian artists teach the decorative industries, mosaics, and painting, such as we see in the garlands of foliage, of fruits, of amours, and of animals that the painters of Pompeii also used to decorate their walls.[1]

[1] For the multiple origins of the art of Byzantium, see the *Manuel d'art byzantin*, by Charles Diehl.

In the illuminations of the manuscripts there is evidently nothing left of the freshness of the world that once went mad with the joy of its self-discovery. But it is the Greek spirit that is here. Man approaches the god with a free attitude; all of life finds its goal in him, as in a center of attraction, and the organization of life

Ravenna (vi Century). Nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo.

is a natural one and well balanced in its elements. If this spirit is less apparent in the great painted idols and in the shining mosaics that decorate the convents and churches from top to bottom, it is because there is less of suppleness in the material, because the surfaces to be covered make severer demands, because a decorative scheme is more necessary, and because the artist is under closer surveillance. Sometimes, upon contact with the soil of Italy, at Ravenna, especially, the images turn into pictures full of movement, and figures pass

among the trees, among the herds, on the sea, or on the shore. Almost always they are stiff, ranged in

Ravenna (vi Century). Capital. (*Sant' Apollinare Nuovo.*)

parallel lines, and possessing no more of the humanity of the Greeks than that expressed in the timid inclinations they make, one toward another, bending their

heads and necks as if to recall the undulation of the great wave that once flowed over the pediments of the old temples. And yet, the soul of antiquity survives in the great, simple gestures, the silence, the calm glances, the indefinable nobility and majesty that descend from the agony of the past. The soul of antiquity survives through their mere existence, because the people can pray before them, because they have invaded the altar, the chapels, and the reliquaries with the gold and the silver and the ivory from which they are cut and the jewels with which they are incrusted. During a century and a half of imperial ordinances, of ecclesiastical interdicts, of revolts and carnage, when the great sculptures of Asia and Greece lie broken in the sanctuaries everywhere, no menace, no persecution will drive them out entirely. Dogmatic in their immobility, Asiatic in their material, they remain Greek before all else, because they express something which, while it may be transformed, vitiated, bastardized, cannot disappear—the instinct which urges a people to demand from the forms of nature the education of its spirit.

II

They are Greek, also, because, despite their fixed attitudes, despite the barbarous splendor that surrounds them and stiffens them, they radiate a profound sense of harmony. They are the troubled instinct, the living seed of a magnificent flower at the bottom of a plague-ridden pool; their fearful splendor is that of those blue or green flies incased in shining metal that breed on rotting meat. The spirit of Phidias has returned to earth and found its way to the charnel house, where life is blindly asserting itself anew. The whole glorious life that hung suspended in the pediments of the temples, swinging from one horizon to another, seems to

have gathered itself in the depths of these Byzantine images. Even the formation of the heads denotes atrophy; life wells up in the great eyes that look out into space, into the darkness, and into the decomposition and the morbid fever in the soul of the people.

Ravenna (vi Century). The Magi, mosaic, detail.
(*Sant' Apollinare Nuovo.*)

The inner spirit of the time makes its true appearance as these strange beings look down from their walls and try, in the prodigious fermentation that is taking place in man's consciousness, to reconcentrate the energy scattered piecemeal over all the pathways of the mind by the decadence of Hellas. The Byzantine idols have regained the immobility of the statues which, before the time of Myron and Phidias, characterized the concentration of all Hellenic effort as it prepared its conquest of an imposing and fugitive equilibrium. But

Ravenna (vi Century). Women bearing offerings, mosaic.
(*Sant' Apollinare Nuovo.*)

the calm of the Dorians and the smile of the Ionians have left them. A dread anxiety dwells in their fixed eyes and around them; instead of the great daylight and the limpid space, there accumulates, in the darkness of the chapels, those magic phosphorescences that steal over heaps of waste and over poisoned waters. The world of Greece, despoiled of the rhythm which had risen so quickly from the depths of its desires to the summit of its will, returns to its origins, to demand of an intoxication, in barbarous harmonies, the meaning of its new presentiments. In the penumbra, inflamed by the heavy glow that falls from the mosaics, one sees but vaguely the motionless processions that carry one —as across a long forgetfulness –back to Panathenaic friezes, and one would imagine oneself in the heart of a Hindu temple all covered with peacock tails petrified in the light. Never did the heavens or the waters have these blue, concentrated, opaque depths, knowing no other limits than the smoky dream that extends them to the infinite. The reds and the greens had never shone with a more liquid splendor to dye the fields of the earth and the broad mirrors of the sea. Never had fire and gold mingled more harmoniously to give an added glory to darkening suns or to envelop prayer in greater voluptuousness. All the colors of the universe seem reduced to a few essential hues, deepened, intensified, made somber through being piled up in limpid glazes and through crystallizing in space the vague harmonies that float across our minds and harass our desires.

Seen through the reddish mist caused by the incense and the ten thousand lighted candles, the Christ Pantocrator, the Virgin, the apostles, and the saints crowned with gold and dressed in shining robes, seemed far away. High up, the great flattened cupola held the nascent dream within the temple, which the half

cupolas at the angles and the three terminal apses connected with the soil by a series of wavelike steps—as the foothills of a mountain chain lead from the peaks

Ravenna (vi Century). Interior of San Vitale.

to the plain. In the ancient temple everything combined to associate the meaning of its external form with the line of the mountains and the surrounding horizons; now it had turned inward, and Greek naturalism was brutally accommodated to the taste of

peoples who had been enervated by Oriental life. Whatever the gathered force on the outside of Saint Sophia, whatever the weight of its round domes, it was by the luxury within that it held the crowds and stupefied the travelers to Constantinople who spread afar the glory of the Greek Empire.

Never did material luxury such as this bind popular sentiment to the letter of a religion which claimed to represent pure spirit. The veined marbles, the polychromed mosaics, the great paintings on the vaults and the walls, the pendentives which permitted the heavy circle of the cupola with its constellations to be inscribed exactly in the square of the building, the silver barrier of the sanctuary, the altar of gold, the tribune of gold, the six thousand candlesticks of gold, the swarm of incrusted gems which covered the gold of the tribune and the altar with a stream of sparks, the censers, crosses, enameled statues, reliquaries, tiaras, and diadems, the rigid, embossed robes in which living idols—the emperor and the patriarch—were held motionless: the whole was like an enormous sphere of diamond, shot through by flames, a resplendent vision suspended from garlands of light. The promised paradises were realized here below.

And yet when the temple is quite bare, as at Périgueux, for example, or when the mosaics, by their tone, are so incorporated in the edifice that, in the warm and reddish penumbra, one sees nothing but what properly belongs to the thick walls, the sturdy and massive pillars, nothing but curving lines, vaults, arches, and semicircles, a strange sense of harmony comes upon one little by little. The virtue of numbers, that mysterious power that is ever present and active in great architecture, on which all the masters depend for authority, which they always invoke and never formulate—the virtue of numbers is imposed with a

formidable, monotonous, and musical authority. Yes, the flattened cupola prevents the dream from rising, but the dream turns and re-turns upon itself unceasingly, in closed coils, in a moving geometry that reproduces, summarizes, petrifies the gravitation of the heavens. The golden spheres turn in their round. Sophistics, which had taken refuge in the councils, and mathematics, which had been exiled, fuse in a pure flash, to inclose architecture in the obedient orbit of the silent worlds.

III

Here, doubtless, is where we must seek the highest expression of an epoch when barbarous luxury crushed intelligence, when the latter was reduced to shutting itself up in the solitary enjoyment of harmonic mysteries which were transmitted from one to another by the initiated. Outside the circles of the adepts, the art of Byzantium was never fully developed, for it was enchained with gold, rendered motionless by dogma and by bureaucratic regulations which fixed the social and professional life of the corporations and the artists, down to its smallest details. Even so, the rise of Byzantine art to its heavy flight was interrupted for more than a century by the edicts of Leo the Isaurian and of his successors who proscribed images. The cult of the icons triumphed only after a hundred years of proscriptions, killings, and furious vandalism. When the images reappeared, the tradition was shattered, the root of the effort was cut, the artists of Byzantium were dispersed by exile into the near-by Orient, into Italy, and as far as Spain and France. If Byzantine art survived, it was because the illuminators continued their work in the monasteries right through the iconoclastic periods; it was because a renewal of energy followed the effort that Constantinople was to make in

Istria (vi Century). The Visitation. (*Church of Parenzo.*)

throwing back the Slavic invasion and the Mohammedan invasion; above all, it was because, with the Crusaders, a great current of life traversed the country. During the two centuries that this current lasted, it filled Byzantium, Salonika, and Syria with those

Rome (ix Century). Church of Saint Praxed. Mosaic.

basilicas with the polygonal towers—so poor on the outside, with their flattened, tile-covered domes, with their indigent and dry material, but so rich in their interior, where, from a blue and green darkness, elongated figures look down out of great eyes. This new life installed itself in the cradle of Venice, penetrated to the heart of the Arab caliphates, to Bagdad, to Abyssinia, where it still persists, invaded Christianized Russia to combine there later on with obscure Asiatic influences which the Mongol invasion brought from Persia, from India, and even from China. It is through

this other current that we explain the icons with their gems and gold, and also the golden cupolas, blown up and bulbous, flattened or elongated, spindling or twisted into rhythmic curves. Everywhere in Europe, up to the hour when the French soul—after having concentrated in the springs of its inspiration all the

Rome (ix Century). Bas-relief of S. Maria in Cosmedin.

currents that had come from the Greek, the Hindu, and the Arabian Orient, from the Scandinavians and the Romans—began, in turn, to pour itself over the Occident, everywhere, for three or four hundred years, the stiff arabesque of Byzantium was found—its flat, symbolic animals, its wheels, its crosses with splayed arms and its bas-reliefs that have the appearance of thorn bushes. In the capitals of columns, in the embroideries of metal, of stone, and of wood that cover the balustrades, doors, and caskets, in the enamel

sheathing of reliquaries, sacred vases, and censers, and in the rigid folds of priestly garments, we witness the steady invasion of a monotonous and systematic art of ornamentation. Its character of monotony and system is the evident mark of the persistence of Greek genius —forced by intelligence to formulate a harmony which

Rome (ix Century). Bas-relief of S. Maria in Cosmedin.

flees the heart of the artist to dwell in the mind of the theorists. But with this characteristic we must consider the profusion of the ornament, which is the evident mark of the persistence of the Romanized genius of Asia, compelled by sensuality to express a richness of impression which the mind of the theorists cannot tear from the heart of the artist. The overabundant flavor of Roman decoration fuses, in a stiff and dull, but impressive, ensemble, with the feeling for balance and selection that characterized Greek decoration. The merchants of Byzantium inundated the world with

carved ivories, gold objects incrusted with enamels and pearls, cloths of gold, and golden reliquaries set with uncut polished gems. In these objects, which were for use in the church and which were exported in such profusion, we see how the hard patience of the carvers and

Byzantine-Asiatic Art. Sculptured parapet.

the lapidaries succeeded in overcoming the moral passivity of the barbarians. Through the Byzantine artisan a semblance of tradition was kept up everywhere; what was left of the effort of Rome and Athens was communicated unconsciously to the sensibility of the new peoples; an indefinite and floating, but real, transition was established between Europe and Asia, between the spirit of antiquity and the spirit of the Middle Ages.

When man's energy for an ascent is exhausted, when a social and political group becomes the motionless

center of gravitation for a world, it is historically necessary that revolution or invasion renew or destroy that world. All the blood sweated by the Middle Ages and all the gold that was heaped up were suffocating Constantinople. Other centers of light were growing in

PÉRIGUEUX (x Century). Nave of Saint-Front.

power. Islam was approaching its summit. The Crusaders, from the end of the eleventh century onward, were hurling Europe upon the Orient in troubled torrents. The barbarians of the west fell on the fabulous cities of the east as the barbarian of the north had marched on Rome. A hundred years after they had pillaged Jerusalem, a city of the Infidel, the Franks pillaged Byzantium, a Christian city. Europe breaks down the rampart that protects her from Asia.

There was in the fourteenth century, indeed, after the fall of the Frankish Empire, a last outburst of energy which spread the art of Constantinople over Rumania,

Monreale (Sicily) (xii Century). The Cathedral.

Serbia, and Macedonia. The mosaics became more living, more full of movement; the world moved; Giottesque Italy, after having undergone the influence of Byzantium, affected Byzantium in its turn. Great painting was perhaps to have emerged from the confusion of the primitives and to prepare, as it did at the

Salonika (xiv Century). Church of the Holy Apostles.

same moment in the Occident, the reign of the individual. But here the effort was too old and had been too often repulsed, the Greek rhythm that was prolonging its echo in other countries was giving way under the pressure of Asia, which was overflowing at every point. It was too late. Even if the Turks had not taken Constantinople, men would have seen that the hour had struck. Manuel Panselinos, who, about the beginning of the sixteenth century, is to cover the convents of Mount Athos with frescoes, seems completely, even too completely, Italianized. And about the end of the same century Theotocopuli flees his

Greek island, leaving behind him nothing but the letter of Byzantium and bearing off its spirit alone, in the sumptuous envelopment of Venetian painting. He sublimated the opulence of Venice in the flame of a heart that is unique in history, that was capable, by its sole action, of making fertile the stormy and solitary soul of Spain. It was too late. In reality, when Mohammed II planted the standard of the Prophet on the Golden Horn and installed Islam in Saint Sophia, the crisis was ending and no event could have modified the issue. In Palestine, in Egypt, in Sicily, in Tunis, in Spain, in France—everywhere about the Mediterranean, the two mystic currents born of the old Semitic ideal had been clashing for three hundred years, repulsing each other at some points, mingling at others, and revealing to each other, despite themselves and unknown to themselves, the resemblance of all men and the unity of their desire.

The Desert

Chapter VI. ISLAM

I

THE two religions confront each other. The drama begins, and we must observe that the ideas which Islam was bringing to the Occidental civilizations and the results of those ideas were more numerous than those which Christianity had, up to that time, offered to the civilizations of the Orient. Islam, which in a savage burst of disinterested faith had launched forth, poor and free, upon the conquest of the earth, having no homeland save its tents and the infinity of a dream which it pursued in the gallop of its horses, in the wind that carried the burnooses and the clouds of dust—Islam, throughout the Middle Ages, was the true champion of the never-attained idea which, the more we seek to grasp it, plunges us only more deeply into the future.

When Justinian had closed the schools of Athens and had driven the artists and scholars from the Empire—at about the period when Gregory the Great burned the Palatine library—it was with the Sassanian King Chosroes that almost all of them took refuge. History has magnificent strokes of chance. The Arabs, masters of Iran, found there the treasures snatched from the shipwreck, and it was these that permitted their scholars to initiate the new Europe into the thought of antiquity. While the shadows were growing thicker over the Occident, the caliphs were opening universities, digging canals, tracing gardens, reviving the study of geometry, geography, and medicine, creating algebra, and covering the conquered lands with caravanseries, mosques, and palaces. Against the black background of the history of those times we see their works as in a dazzling fairy tale, a great heroic story from the *Thousand and One Nights.*

The miracle of the Arabian mind is that it remained itself everywhere and dominated everywhere without, of itself, creating anything. Anarchic, nomadic, and a unit, as little bounded by moral as by material frontiers, it could, through that very fact, adapt its genius to that of the conquered peoples and at the same time persuade the vanquished to allow themselves to be absorbed in the unity of that genius. Coptic in Egypt, Berber in the Moghreb and in Spain, Persian in Persia, Indian in India, Islam allows the converted races—in Egypt, in the Moghreb, in Spain, in Persia, and in India—to express, according to their nature, the new enthusiasm which it knew so well how to communicate to them. Wherever it established itself, it remained master of the people's heart.

When Abu-Bekr proclaimed the holy war after the death of Mohammed, the first conquerors of Syria and Egypt installed their immobile dream in the

Cairo (vii Century). Interior of the mosque of Amru.

Byzantine or Coptic churches which they came upon in their path. The earlier consecration of the edifice did not matter much to them. They were at home everywhere. They covered the mosaics and the frescoes with a coat of paint, hollowed out a mihrab in the wall facing toward Mecca, and lost themselves in ecstasy, their eyes fixed on that spot. When, in Egyptian, Greek, or Roman ruins, they found ancient columns, they assembled them haphazard, often with the capital downward, all mingling like trees in the same living unity. On three sides of the inner court, where the fountain for ablutions brought to the dried-out soil the eternal freshness of the earth, their parallel rows of columns carried ogive arcades which supported the flat roofs common to the hot countries. The outer walls remained as bare as ramparts. Egypt recognized its dream in that of its conquerors.

But enthusiasm creates action and incites to discovery. Three centuries have passed, the era of the conquests has closed. Islam extends, *via* northern Africa, from the plateau of Iran to the Pyrénées. The nomad enjoys his conquered domains, arouses the energies that had grown weary there, and consents to animate with his spirit the plastic genius of the vanquished peoples, who have become fanatics. All the oases that sow the deserts of Africa and Spain transform themselves into white cities, are surrounded with crenelated walls, and behold, springing up rapidly, palaces rich in shade where the emirs come to seek the cool after having crossed the sands. When the horde or the caravan has marched long days in the reddish and moving circle whose edge is never reached, it is no longer the bouquet of palms that it sees when the burning air that vibrates and rises has hung a vision in the sky: it is a pink or bluish haze wherein terraces, rounded needles, and cupolas tremble behind

an imponderable veil. The Moslem soul, even at the hour when it thought it had gained control over itself, never grasped more than a mirage, a cool shadow, spread for an hour between two sheets of flame over which the conquerors passed.

CONSTANTINOPLE. Saint Sophia (532), with Turkish minarets.

When their great drive was ended, when the dream which had always surged like a wave before them found itself stopped by the sea or by barriers of mountains or by the walls of Byzantium or the squadrons of the Franks, it had to find some other escape and, the horizon being closed, it had to move upward. Now it stifles under the Byzantine cupola, it spreads and stretches out under the ceiling of the Egyptians.[1] The heavy semicircular arch of the basilicas has already become the broken arch that launches upward. The spherical cupola will likewise take on ascending lines.

[1] Al. Gayet, *L'Art Arabe.*

especially in the palaces, the alcazars and the alhambras of Andalusia, where one's enervated fancy wanders from the halls of red and gold, black, emerald, or turquoise blue to the great colonnaded courts, to the paved gardens where the perfume of the lemon trees, the mimosas, and the orange trees weighs on the stifling air, and to the motionless shadows under which basins of marble offer to the yews long mirrors of pure water in which to dip their image. Empty of animate forms, the mind of the Moghreb artist sought restlessly to break the monotony of its plastic visions by combining familiar lines and twisting them in every direction. The semicircular arch drew its points together, curved itself into a horseshoe, was narrowed, foreshortened, splayed, loaded with stalactites, with cells like those of a beehive, and was fretted to a greater or less extent with festoons and lacework. And when the formula was exhausting itself there came the arabesque that bit into the stone, carved into openwork the plaster moldings wherein the stained-glass windows were incased, and invaded the rectangular framework of the arcades. It sent its winding flame even to the inner surfaces—blue, red, white, and gold—of the niches and vaults that offered an escape from the world outside, from the sun and the soil whose torrid uniformity heightened the charm of the multicolored paradises stretching out in the cool shadow and the silence over the perfumed waters and the soft divans.

When linear ornament had attained its full sweep, it invaded the mosque, like the alcazar, from the base of the walls to the top of the cupolas. Disdainful or ignorant of the form of a world that offered little to attract the eye, the Arab had the time to pursue, to combine, to vary, and to multiply his arabesques. In the interlacing rosework, the polygonal ornaments, the stylized inscriptions, all the ornamental motifs

issuing together from a vague and subtle imagination, ecstasy, doubt, serenity, and distress were expressed by the obliqueness, the verticality, the waviness, the detours, and the horizontality of the lines. All the ornamental motifs corresponded with the obscure and complex ensemble of man's feelings and were developed

CORDOVA (VIII Century). Interior of the great mosque.

to the point of mingling, superimposing, and juxtaposing themselves in squares, circles, bands, ovals, and fans. They passed without apparent effort—like the soul itself—from exaltation to depression, from reverie to logic, from rectangular forms to rounded forms, and from the fantasy of the unrestrained curves to the severities of the geometrical figures. Everything that detached from the walls, the *nimbars*,[1] the banisters, and the gratings, was embroidered with interlacing

[1] In Moorish architecture the term for the niche in the mosque indicating the direction of Mecca.

lines; stone and plaster were perforated, wood was inlaid, plaques of bronze, silver, and gold were carved. . . . An immense system of tapestries and embroideries seems to be spread over the walls, to cover the arcades, to distribute the light from the windows, and some-

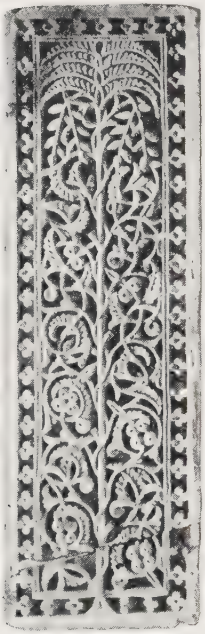
Cairo. Detail of the façade of the Kalaoum Mosque (1284).

times to fall on the cupolas and the graded minarets where the interlacings and the arabesques became more and more complicated. The whole thing became like a hanging fairyland, like cobwebs in the great garden of space, dust, and sunlight.

The arabesque had had its hour of concrete life. Geometric ornament, into which it was to evolve, is never born spontaneously; it realizes, in the brain of

Granada (xiii Century). Hall of the Abencerrages in the Alhambra.

the artists, the final stylization of a motif from nature, just as the mathematical formula is, for the scientist, the form of expression which a truth derived from experience must take, and thereby grow inert. The arabesque was born of the twining together of flowers and leaves, as we first find it around the arcades of the old mosque of Ibn-Touloun at Cairo, when, after the end of the conquest, the imagination of the Arabs was less tense and had the leisure to become complicated and the desire to become subtler. It took on a far rarer quality when the fourteenth century had fixed its law of decoration. And this progressive passage from the living line to the ideographic line, from the ideographic line to the geometric line, sharply defines the spiritual direction of this art. When the regular polygon made its appearance in the *répertoire* of ornament, the Arab geometrists tried to deduce from it general principles which would permit them to extend the system of the polygon to the whole of decoration. Arab art, from that time on, became an exact science[1] and allowed the reverie of the mystic to be inclosed in the hard language of perfectly bare abstraction.



Mosque of the Aljafería, decorative detail. (*Museum of Saragossa.*)

Born of the desert, where there are no forms, where space alone reigns and has neither beginning nor end, Arabian spirituality found its supreme expression in the

[1] A formula drew from the polygon and brought back to it all the geometrical motifs of decoration.

arabesque which also has neither beginning nor end. The eye cannot come to rest on it. It is like those voices of the silence that we hear and follow in their interminable round when we listen only to ourselves, and when our feelings and ideas are enmeshed confusedly in a kind of languid pleasure which we experi-

GRANADA (XIII and XIV Centuries). Ornaments of the Hall of the Ambassadors in the Alhambra.

ence when we allow our consciousness to become closed to the impressions of the world. If the reverie aims to reach some conclusion, if the metaphysical abstraction seeks to clarify itself, it can find no other language—since it has remained outside of life—than the mathematical abstraction which compels the mind to move in an absolute of convention.

It is singular that the most precise of the languages that we employ, the most useful to our modern civilizations, should also be the one which—when we seek dis-

interestedly the pleasure of its abstract creations—should awaken in us only those sentiments that are most lacking in precision and most impossible to seize upon. It is singular that this instrument of pure mind should serve only our most material needs, and that, when used to explore the spiritual world, it should be the most impotent of all in penetrating its mystery. All-powerful when we desire to know what motionless matter is, it is of no use whatever as soon as we seek enlightenment regarding living matter in its activity and its evolution. If it is an incomparable weapon for a mind that dominates it, it is dead for a mind that can be dominated by it.

Art, like life itself, is in a constant state of evolution. If scientific certainty is perchance substituted in the soul of the artist for the desire for that certitude which not only torments him but gives him strength, the need for effort is destroyed within him, and enthusiasm weakens because static realization has replaced the constant renewal of desire. When mathematics is introduced into the domain of the artists, it should remain in the hands of the architects as an instrument whose purpose is to define and determine the logic of the edifices they construct. But architecture cannot pretend to do more than adapt a building to its utilitarian function and suggest, by the direction of its lines, the most powerful, but also the vaguest, of the great collective sentiments. It is not the prerogative of mathematics to monopolize form and thereby inclose it within a wall of pure abstraction. When it prevents sculpture from developing and the painted image from being born, it condemns the people which it expresses to remain slaves to the temporary form, which they had given to their idea; it condemns them to die.

What endows it with its greatness endows it also

with its weakness. It is slain by the realization of its purposes. It does not renew itself, since the individual cannot break the definitive formulas in which, by its own will, it had inclosed itself. The mosque and the

GRANADA (XIV Century). Patio de la Alberca in the Alhambra.

Arabian world grow motionless together, exactly at the moment when the Occidental peoples are emerging from the collective rhythms. It is in the hope of a discovery half seen that men gain the power they express in their work, and from this moment on the mosque builders begin to lose courage.

Mosque of the Aljafería, detail. (*Museum of Saragossa.*)

If the desert reveals to men the unity of mind, it is also responsible for the mind's forgetting the few forms that are presented. From the desert came the antisocial and anticivilizing conception of the two irreconcilable worlds of the immaterial soul and the material body. After the death of a people that has failed to discover and to express its accord with the external universe, there remains nothing of that people, however great its courage; the spirit which men follow is that which knows how to animate with its life the forms of that universe. It is the rocks, the water, and the trees which, through the spirit of the Greeks, made the Occident fertile. Every time that history hesitates, we look to the pediments of the temples where men recognize themselves in the gods.

III

The Arab, it is true, never compels the artist to refrain entirely from representing animate life, and sometimes it trembles furtively on the walls of the palaces and mosques of Spain and Morocco. Like all the monotheistic peoples who have been modeled by the desert, he was only obeying his instinctive repugnance for everything that is living form. Religion represses instinct only during periods of decadence. During periods of strength, instinct sweeps religion along with it in whatever direction it chooses. In Egypt or in Syria, Mohammedan art had the nakedness, the sadness, and the grandeur of the desert. In the depths of the cool grottoes of the Moghreb and of Spain, where the caliphs came to listen to the pholosophers and to breathe the odor of the lemon trees after their cavalry had reaped its harvest, Mohammedan art seemed to work with blocks of gold ground in clotted blood. In India, it allowed the whole flood of

the world of matter to invade the mosque. On the plateaus of Iran it was like a field of flowers.

Persia no more resembles the sandy plains of the eastern Mediterranean than it does the Andalusian or

Cairo (xvii Century). Interior of the Bordeini Mosque.

Moroccan valleys, which are forever contested by hard shadow and by fire. To the west, in the upper regions which border the central desert, high above the dust, three thousand meters above sea level, and thus so much nearer the stars, the air has the transparence,

PERSIA. Young men making a sacrifice, miniature.
(*Private Collection.*)

the limpidity of glass. In the breath of the wind the white meadows and the pink meadows there are mottled like watered silk, and from spring to autumn the broad strips of poppies and the fields of grain run the gamut of all the uncertain color tones, from tender green to golden yellow. The skies, where the pigeons fly, and the clouds have those delicate tints that one can observe in the earliest blossoming of trees. The cities are deluged with roses.[1]

When one approaches them their assemblies of domes, ovoid, swelling, or twisted, and their long, straight minarets that emerge from the groves of cypresses and plane trees, seem like memories already blurred by uncertainty. In turquoise blues, burnt-out pinks, pale greens, and dulled yellows the mirage has taken on the appearance of an aërial water color painted with vapor on the fleeing horizon that is known to artists who have followed the path of the caravans from oasis to oasis. Near-by one sees crumbling walls, cracking cupolas, minarets whose decoration of interlacing black and white is scaling off. It is ruins that are before us. But they are the ruins of a recent period. The enamel that clothes them, the old Chaldean enamel that ancient Persia had made known to China and that China brought back to Iran by the Tartar hordes—the enamel has kept its glassy brilliancy under the coating of silicate that covers the brick. Violets, blues, and browns, ivory whites, lilacs, yellows, and greens, shine in these enamels, pure or in combinations that make rosebushes and anemone or iris flowers over white inscriptions and arabesques of gold. The pulpy flesh and the pearly surface of the flowers marry and swell the living garlands that here replace the abstract arabesque in which the inventive faculty of the Arabs

[1] Pierre Loti, *Vers Ispahan*.

found its expression. Under the high ogive of the doors framed with a crust of enamel, the dim glow of turquoises, amethysts, and lapis lazuli makes a creeping phosphorescence; under the inner crown of the domes whose rounded softness knows nothing of the mystic impulse of the desert, the ornaments shaped like

PERSIA. Elephants fighting, miniature.
(*Musée des Arts Décoratifs.*)

honeycomb drip with stalactites. Sometimes the interior of the cupolas sends forth flashes from plates of glass combined with prisms.

It was in an ancient and forgotten period that the people spread on the walls the Persian carpets resembling dark, plowed earth into which crushed flowers have been pressed. In their place shone enameled brick when, at the end of the sixteenth century, the great Abbas suddenly caused the monumental fairyland of Ispahan to be built. The Persian school of painting which was born at that moment had only to listen to the counsels of the men who gave the wealth of decoration to the enameled mosques in order to

reach, through Djahangir, through Mani, and through Behzade especially, the highest living expression that Mussulman art has known. The whole industry of the potter, everywhere most ancient and most durable, brought its necessary contribution to this art also. The Persian pot is already painting crystallized in fire. Its decoration, which is not very rich in images, is doubtless the richest of all in its ever new stylization of the summits of sensation. Nothing remains of the world of the senses save what is profoundest in color, what is most immaterial in the object, most fleeting in the form. Neither the sky nor the sea nor the flowers are painted there, but beds of flowers break through with their freshest corollas, great stretches of sky with their pearliest billows of cloud, and the immensity of the seas with their shining surface. In spots, in creeping lines, in drops, in clusters, and in mottlings, the most elaborate and elusive principles of the flowers, the sky, and the sea are evoked according to the changes in the harmonies with which they fill the memory. The rare painting of Persia arrests this fugitive splendor in every form depicted. The school flowers suddenly, to fade quickly, and to die in two centuries because it had given out too much perfume and brilliancy. It was like an enchanted dream in which for an hour there were blended the passionate sensuality of India, the mannerism of the Persians, the slow science of the Chinese, and the great fairy dream world of the Arabs.

Rolling its treasure from the deserts of Arabia to the happy islands of Japan, and from the Moghreb to India, Persian painting is like a deep ocean made up of all the ingenuous desires of the flesh, all the frankness of its intoxications, all the puerilities, the smiles, the wild and touching fancies of the primitive peoples suddenly carried beyond the rosy gates of the paradise

Behzade (Persia). Man painting.
(*From Les Miniatures Persanes.*)

of art! . . . It was an Eden where tigers trod on meadows full of flowers, where men and women in robes of silk—green, red, or blue—men and women with delicate noses, little mouths, very long black eyes, and oval faces, were seated in a circle on beautiful embroidered carpets. Trees in bloom rose against backgrounds all of gold. For the Persian there could never be enough flowers: there are flowers on those lawns of almost black green which make one feel that living water is near; there are flowers among all the leaves, flowers on the carpets, flowers everywhere, enormous flowers whose trace is to be found even on the little cups of coral and of porcelain from which the ladies and gentlemen with golden spoons dip the candied flowers. In landscapes of red, green, or gold, whose natural symphonies take on the quality of a deep and precious velvet, nervous, delicate black horses with curving necks pass at a gallop, each bearing a proud rider, a falcon on his wrist, a brilliant aigrette on his turban. Multicolored birds fly in the trees—they are genii who talk with men, far better than those golden birds with topaz eyes which flew and beat their wings about the throne of the Byzantine autocrat. Magical palaces open their gates of light and their porticos of lace; their enameled or damascened walls are embroidered with gems; their ceilings are of crystal; silent carpets lead to thrones of gold where golden peacocks spread tails of emerald; there are gardens with vases of porphyry and jets of water where the sun lights up opals, graded white terraces, and cupolas, pink, azure, or milky. Even in the depths of the night they gleam like the snow at dawn. When evening came, one listened to musicians on the blue waters, one breathed the odor of the fruits that gleam in the black heart of the trees. The djinns descended among men with baskets of rubies and baskets of topazes, and the

rising moon was like a pearl fallen from the necklace of stars that encircles the sky. . . . All this is painted with subtle strokes, with brilliant tones that die out in their harmonies, with the tremulous purity of the

PERSIA (XVI Century). The Hunt, miniature.
(*Bibliothèque Nationale.*)

shadows, and with the unchanging light of the day. Here are all the Thousand and One Nights dreamed of by the old story-tellers who, from evening to morning, talked inexhaustibly to the gay travelers seated in a circle under the tent.

Here are strange races, veritable masses of contrasts; and the deeper they plunge into the desert, the farther they live from the cities, the heavier the sun that beats

upon them, the more marked and surprising these contrasts become. Here are men who wear robes of green and red silk under burnooses of white wool, and who cover the harness of their horses with gold. They forge weapons and incrust them with gems; they keep their water pure in damascened copper. They know only silence and melancholy contemplation, or else frenzied laughter and uproar. They forget their natural sobriety to enter suddenly on a round of incredible feasting. They despise death, they despise life. Among them a state of ecstasy follows hard upon crises of unbridled sensuality. Their paradise of abstractions is peopled with women. Their terrible fanaticism is unequaled by anything but their terrible inertia; the flight of time is nothing for them, and they let their temples crumble with an indifference as marked as the ardor which they expended in building them.

The excessive climate, the great contrasts of nature, and the life of the nomad have created this ignorance of—or this disdain for—the balance of soul that we love. The oasis is too cool after the sands, the water is so sweet to the burnt lips, the cities offer to the wanderers such hot pleasures and such gold! The rich man shall have a hundred wives and the poor man shall have none, and so there is a gap that can never be filled between the metaphysical absolutes and the worst bestiality. But the races of the Occident fill this gap by exploring all the roads that must be traveled in order to rise from and by means of sensual life to the threshold of the heroic life. With these races of the Occident we must number some of the Oriental races which belong to the same ethnic groups as the European peoples. It was, doubtless for this reason, that the Persians—whose mind was less spacious, perhaps, but certainly more curious than that of the Semites—

Turkish (?) Art. The Repast.
(*From Les Miniatures Persanes.*)

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Turkish (?) Art. The Repast.
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never swerved from their historic role, which is to carry on forever into the future a little of the immemorial civilizations of the country of the rivers. It was for this reason again that in Persian art there was no break in continuity between Sassanian Persia and Mussulman Persia, and that the carpets and the vases continued to be made in the same workshops. Because of their racial quality, also, the Persians recovered from the Tartar invasions and outlived the Arabs in their period of greatness by three centuries. It was for the same reason, also, that the idol worshipers of Byzantium will one day be justified by the moral history of the world, as they triumphed, ten centuries ago, in their struggle with those who were opposed to the idols. A resolutely spiritual religion must, doubtless, do without images, even at the risk of declining, at the risk of dying; but what we need to know is whether it is better for us to cultivate pure spirit or the images. It is a weak defense of the iconoclastic emperors to show them as encouraging art whenever it was separate from religion. Art is one; its growth increases with the growth of a living faith, regardless of the way in which it is clothed or labeled or of the role in which men try to arrest it; and if religion dies of freedom, art lives only through its introducing into the world a little more freedom each time it manifests itself. To forbid art to drink at any one source is to dry up all the sources at once.

If idolatry did not save Byzantium, it was because Byzantium was not a beginning, but an end, a rotten fruit of the Greek tree. But it was idolatry which made Egypt and Greece and India, which unchained the great Gothic revolution and the Italian and Flemish Renaissance, and which, later, at the threshold of our own time, aroused sensualism, transformism, and the admirable, vital investigation of the whole last cen-

tury in Europe. All durable civilizations are born of idolatry, obliged, as they have been, to demand that

PERSIA (XVI Century). Carpet, fragment.

external nature surrender to them the inexhaustible treasure of her teachings in order that they may give reality to the images that are within them. We cannot demand that humanity live in the desert forever,

when we see that even the peoples of the desert seek the oases.

We may not believe that among idolatrous peoples the superior minds have freed themselves from idolatry: they have freed themselves by it. It is they who, by it, by the living relationships that it revealed to them, have introduced reason into the world, not as an end in itself, but as an incomparable instrument for analysis and for the liberation of the individual. The peoples who recognize nothing but the spirit are the only ones who have never been able to detach themselves from the metaphysical idols which the blankness of the desert imposes on their meditations, because they have been powerless to seize upon their thought and confront it with life.

Moreover, far from arresting the dream, the image offers it a point of support, which enables it to keep within the limits of human reality, and at the same time the dream is broadened because the relationships which the image reveals to it cause other relationships to be suspected, other images to be desired; and so men draw from realization—always a dead thing—the ever-living hypothesis. Idolatry leads to experience and through it to action. When we have lost our equilibrium, it is to the idols that we turn to invoke them to teach us form and life once more. Science is the aspect that our eternal idol worship wears at the present time. Idolatry saves the world when nothing but a little invisible dust is left of the great unbalanced dreams which have been lived by the prophet-peoples fashioned by the desert.

ROUEN

Chapter VII. CHRISTIANITY AND THE COMMUNE

I

THE Semitic spirit, at the decline of the old world, tried to conquer Europe through the apostles of Christ, as it was to take possession of western Asia and of Africa through the knights of Islam. But through the desert, the bare sky, and life without movement the religion of Mohammed remained near to its sources. It could easily retain its original form and spiritualize everything, even to its

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—The following lines from the *Encyclopædia Britannica* will explain M. Faure's preference for the words "ogive" and "ogival" as against the more common but less precise word "Gothic," in speaking of the architecture dealt with in this chapter and the next.

"A very great step in advance was made by the invention or application of diagonal ribs under the intersection of the plain groined vault. This

expression in plastics. Europe offered to the Jewish idea an outline less suited to it. The contact with the cultivated land, with the woods, with the running waters, with the clouds, and with mobile and living form, was to impose on the religion of Saint Paul a sensuous and concrete form which turned the idea from its original direction, little by little, and was to bring the peoples of the Occident back to the course of their natural destiny.

It is true that the impress had been made. The Jewish apostolate, through the power for penetration which it derived from its disinterested faith, carried with it a disappointing dualism, but at the same time it peopled the inner solitude of the masses who had been forgotten by the civilizations of the past. Its pitiless insistence on justice fortified the social instinct in them. And it is thanks to this that the Greek spirit and the Semitic spirit slowly brought about in the crucible of the Occident an accord of which Æschylus had the presentiment and for which Jesus had the desire.

Had Christianity remained as Saint Paul desired it and as the fathers of the Church defined it, it must needs have turned its back upon the plastic interpretations of the ideas which it introduced. But as it wished to live, it obeyed the law which compels us to give to our emotions the form of the things that we see. In Rome, while it was groping in the shadow, trying to tear its doctrine from the confused mass of

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association of strengthening ribs in a cross form to each bay of the structure forms the *ogive*, the characteristic form from which the alternative name of Gothic, 'ogival,' has been derived. . . . The word 'Gothic' was applied by Italian writers of the Renaissance to buildings later than Roman. What we now call 'Gothic' the same writers called 'Modern.' Later the word came to mean the art which filled the whole interval between the Roman period and the Renaissance, and then, last of all, when the Byzantine and Romanesque forms were defined, Gothic became the art which intervened between the Romanesque era and the Renaissance."

the old myths, graven and painted figures were appearing, from the first century onward, upon the walls of the Catacombs. They announced new gods, to be sure, but their form remained pagan, even Greek, most often, for it was the Oriental slave who propagated the religion of Galilee in Rome. Grown clumsy in

Cahors (xi Century). The cathedral, detail.

the hands of the poor people, the art which, above the street level, builds thermæ and amphitheaters, which covers villas with frescoes and gardens with statues, hesitates in the darkness underground. The soul of the people will not be silent until the day when official Christianity emerges from beneath the soil to take possession of the Roman basilicas and decorate them with pompous emblems. It will require ten centuries of seclusion before it finds its real expression and compels the upper classes to return to the deeper life and to embrace the hope which has been set free.

The organization of the new theocracy, the repeated invasions of the barbarians, hunger, torpor, and the frightful misery of the world between the fall of the

Autun (xi Century). Capital from the nave of the cathedral.

Empire and the time of the Crusades, did not permit any people of western Europe to take root in its soil. In return, although every human tide carried away the new cities built on the newly made ruins, the tribes

descending from the north succumbed, little by little, to the domination of the moral unity inherent in the Christian idea for which the trappings of the ancient civilizations offered an imposing framework. Over the heads of the peoples in their unhappiness, the instinct

Poitiers (xi Century). Church Notre Dame la Grande

of the military chiefs, who had rallied to the letter of organized Christianity, brings them into alliance with the higher clergy, whose spirit, through contact with the warrior class, becomes more and more harsh. When Gregory the Great, some years after Justinian, ordered the destruction of what remained of the old libraries and of the temple of the ancient gods, he consecrated the accord of Rome with the barbarians. The soul of antiquity was dead, indeed. The monarchies of the Orient gather up its last echoes, the monasteries stir up its dust.

The religious communities had remained, up to the Crusades, the only isles of light in darkened Europe. The cloistered luxury of a chosen few, a hothouse civilization, was the representative of sixty centuries of effort, of sensibility, of living realizations. Thebes, Memphis, Babylon, Athens, Rome, and Alexandria

Moissac (xii Century). Abacus of a capital of the cloister.

were contained within the four walls of a monastery, in old manuscripts thumbed by the hard men who opposed the necessary counterpoise of the Rule, to the frightful impulses of a world that had fallen back to the primitive state. But it was around these walls, in these out-of-the-way valleys, away from the great highways which saw the massacres that, here and there, the people of the countryside were assembling to shape the future. The north of Gaul during the Merovingian period had no other centers of activity in the chaos of manners, races, and languages that hov-

ELNE (Pyrenées-Orientales) (XII Century). Belfry of the church.

ered over this agony of the burning cities and the ruined harvests.

In the south, on the contrary, tradition was still profoundly alive. The aqueducts, the arenas, the thermæ, and the temples were still erect in the landscape that is silvered by the forests of olive trees. The amphitheaters still opened their pure curve to the light. The sculptured sarcophagi were in their accustomed place, bordering the roads shaded by the plane trees that are whitened by winter when it despoils them of their leaves and that remain white under the dust of summer. On this burnt earth of southern France, which outlines itself against the sky with the sure lines that one finds again beside the bays of Greece, Gallo-Roman art united quite naturally the positivism of Rome, Hellenic elegance, and the fresh vitality of the Gauls. It declined but little, if at all, upon the passage of the Arabs, who were adopted by this burning soil. Nothing could arrest its fever. Under its violent sun, the blood of nomadic Asia mingled with that of Greco-Latin Gaul. It was a strange, cruel, perverse world, but one of intense, irrepressible life; its ideal was one of equality and it was freer and more extensive than the remainder of France when the division of the empire of Charlemagne had separated it from the north, which was beginning to discuss its problem of Frankish or Norman domination.

When an orgy of love and blood craves the excitement that results from the nervous tension of the higher culture, when morbid sensuality and exasperated intelligence arise from the same ground, the lightning that flashes from their meeting sets fires burning, and their flame leaps high into the air, fed by all the winds that blow, by the dust they bring, and by the debris of green wood and dead wood alike which they hurl into the blaze together. A hybrid

and convulsive art emerges from the earth, a trifle frail, but so glowing in its intensity that its onrush leaves a groove that cannot be effaced. The trail of fire passed over Provence, surrounded Toulouse, and ascended to the plateau of central France. The antique columns were set up again round the nervous and clumsy bas-reliefs that were painfully inscribed within the rigid curve of the portals. Byzantium and Islam deposited their ferment and their spark in the heart of the material that still retained its memory of the Romans; and the Crusades brought back to the stones, stirring in their new animation, a disordered tribute of memories of Greece and the Syrian world, and, with these, the more distant echo of Persia and India. When the Clunisians set to work upon the stones, about the eleventh century, and erected them according to Norman and Scandinavian ideas, which we see also in the heavy jewels that bear the trace of the oldest traditions of Asia, the great Romanesque style crystallized suddenly, to become, in the hands of the monks, the purest architectural expression of organized Christianity.

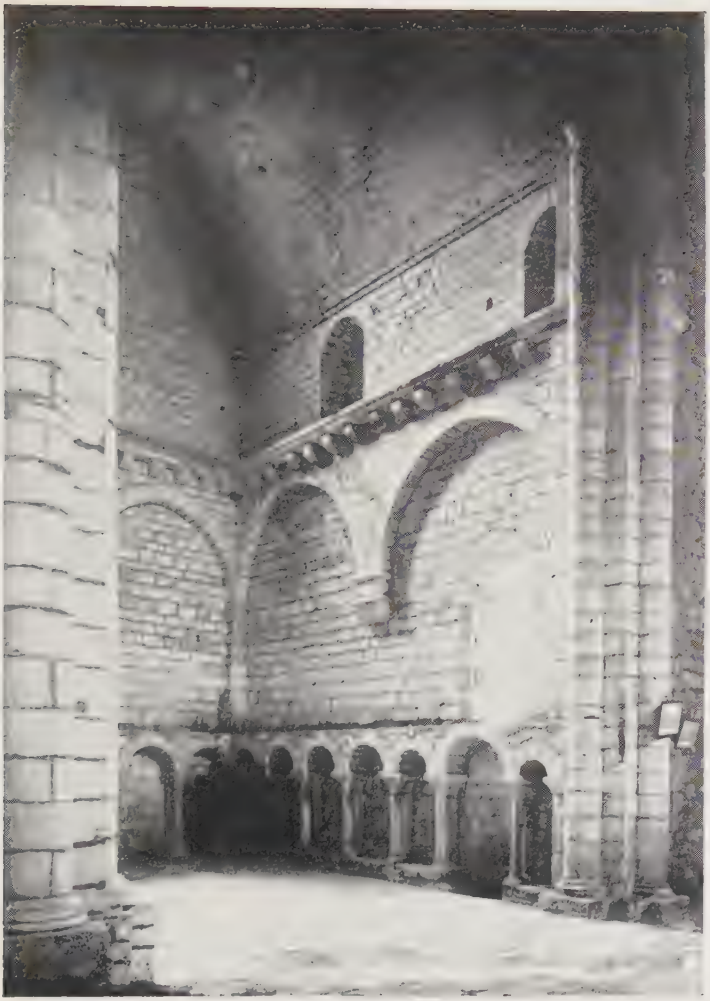
II

The church built on the plan of a cross evolved from the old basilicas; stiff and thick-set, it has to make an effort to lift up toward heaven its two burly towers, vibrating with their bells, but unshaken by the wind. If the heavy arch that weighed on the central nave did not crush down its supports, it was because the other naves were loaded with lengthwise vaults supported by enormous walls which suppressed the empty spaces where the openings for windows would have been. The farther the nave was extended, the thicker the walls became, and the deeper became the darkness in the sanctuary, daubed with red and with blue. The

short painted pillars there, with their capitals cut into by crude forms, seemed to bear the formidable weight of a sky filled with eyes that judge and with gates that close on paradises seen but for a brief moment. The edifice was like a crouching monster whose over-heavy

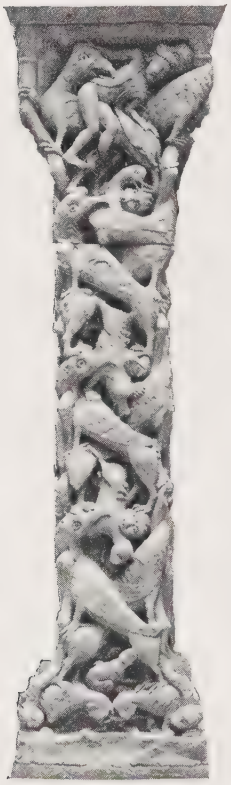
Moissac (xii Century). Detail from the western door.

spine bore down on its thick paws. In the center of the silent cloisters, which cut out a square of shade in the light of the south, the soil might crack with drought, but there was cold under the vaults. From these gathered forms, from these clear-cut façades, where the firm semicircle of the arch opened between massive columns, there radiated a naked strength which affirmed the elegance—austere, brutal, and categorical—of a caste in possession of undisputed power. It is the exact image of a fixed Catholicism—the authority of the Councils seated on rock. No outlook on life is



Saint-Amand de Coly (Dordogne) (xii Century).
Interior of the transept of the church.

afforded—the soul alone has the right to life, on condition that it never breaks through the continuous circle of stone in which it is held by dogma. Rome has cemented the thought of Saint Paul in the material of the churches.



Souillac (xii Century). A pillar of the church.

When the uncompromising morality of this rigid world, clad in rough cloth and iron, was ready to quit the pages of the manuscripts and the pulpit of the temples and to show its symbolized face to the multitude, when the four animals of the Evangelists consented to have grow up beside them a new world of animate forms that descended the length of the columns and escaped to the very tympanums of the doors and invaded their lintels, Saint Bernard was the only one who perceived that an era was about to end. The monks could no longer close their eyes, when once the day had touched them with its light. Once life had begun to penetrate dogma, there could be no question as to the final result, even if a few centuries were still needed before life should be released by the compact and closed mass of doctrinary Christianity. In vain it opened its hell, sent stiff, devouring monsters to crawl upon the stones, unchained horrible battles between the absolute virtues and the irreducible vices, divided the world into definitive truths and definitive errors: life, poor and bruised, but regaining its mastery little by little, was introducing its subtle

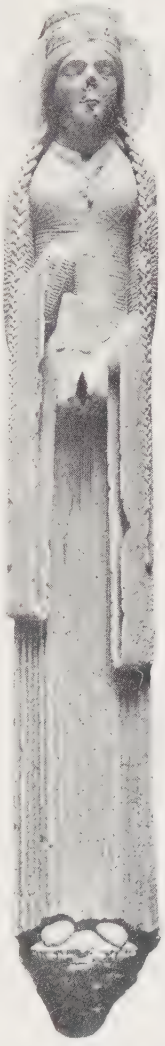
Vézelay (xii Century). Figures in the tympanum of the church.

connecting passages between each of these pairs of moral entities in order to animate them and to unite them.

It was clearly impossible that in this universe which had been closed for ten centuries, the monk sculptor of the Romanesque churches, the theologian armed with a chisel, should discover any more, at first, than a meager type of nature—emaciated, compressed, and suffering, like himself. Long figures, which make a tragic effort to break the mold of the Byzantine, were flattened against the new façades, mechanically expressing an arrested symbolism. The only men, precisely, who reserved the right, at that moment, to express form and life were the heirs and guardians of a theology that had not ceased for a thousand years to look upon and to condemn form and life as contemptible appearances. For the same length of time, the people had been crushed between the material invasion of the barbarians and the moral invasion of Christianity. It had resigned itself, in the promised hope of a future life, to the hazards of its actual life, and, when it fled the devastations of its countryside, it found no other refuge than its feeling for the supernatural.

But despite everything, and contrary to the life and the ideal which they had accepted, the artist-monks were expressing, in those primitive sculptures that were invading the porches of the churches in ever denser crowds, the first sudden perturbations of the needs of their time. A singular force was mounting very rapidly within these works. In close-growing vegetation made up of these rough forms, there circulated something of the sap and the energy which, in the same centuries, were lifting up the wrought stone of the Dravidian pyramids and the Cambodian temples. A dull rhythm, a heavy and vigorous rhythm—like that with which the flood of the springtime carries

its wealth of buds up out of the soil—runs through these rude figures, these heads, and bodies that are hardly more than squared off, and which are elevated in a single movement. A puissant grace, a candid and robust charm hesitate in the stone itself. Clear-cut planes define the elementary movements that incline one face toward another face and cause one hand to reach out toward another. They seem to obey the silent music which groups numbers into constructions and into figures, according to the summary but essential appearance that reveals them to us when our minds are strongly aroused. It is a rough expression but a fervent one that results from this dramatic meeting of Christian symbolism at its highest tension and popular realism in the innocence of its dawn. The breast of the world was dilating slowly, but with an irresistible effort that was to burst its armor. There had been no invasion for a century or two. Born of war and living by it, the feudal lord carries war to the surrounding countries. Gaul, to which the military chiefs had been leading their hordes for so many years, became the central hearth for the fire of expansion and conquest. About the closing years of the eleventh century, the one during which the Romanesque church allowed its compressed life to burst its shell, the Norman barons



CHARTRES (XII Century). A saint. (*Cathedral.*)

passed into Sicily and into England, and the first Crusade hurled the French barons upon the Holy Land. Feudal brutality emigrated for two hundred years.

III

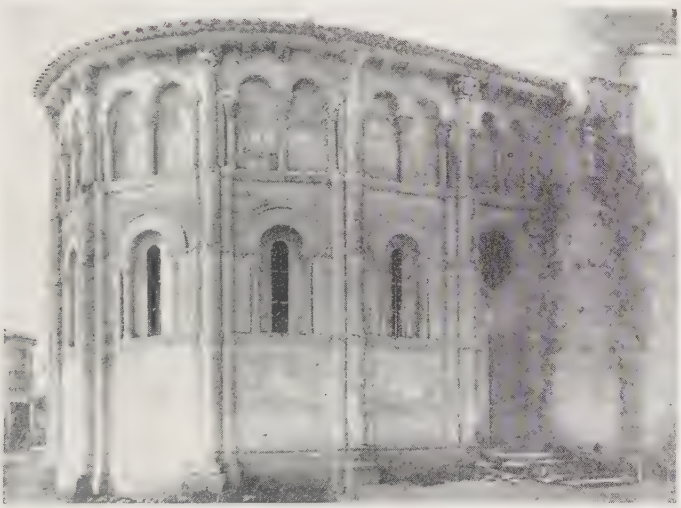
Then the native soil, that which the peoples knew no longer, their roots having been torn from it in every generation by some human tempest—the native soil

CHARTRES (XII Century). Angel. (*Cathedral.*)

rose to the heart of its races. At the same time, the profound movement which cast the mystic and miserable Occident upon the rich Orient, sent flowing back upon the Occident the life of wonderful lands, of other faiths, of other legends, of other customs, and the powerful, confused sensation of a material world and a

world of the soul broadening while changing in appearances, and of a universe that would not be contained within the limits of revealed religion.

The earth quivers with pride. Almost at the same hour, appear the Republic of Florence and the Uni-



Begadam (Gironde) (xii Century). Apse of the church.

versities of Palermo, of Bologna, of Paris. In the very bosom of the Church there are born spirits more religious than the Church, and they subject dogma to a courageous examination. Abelard, the Christian, denies original sin, contests the divinity of Jesus, exalts once more the dignity of the senses, and tries to establish—from antiquity to the Middle Ages, by the impartial study of ancient philosophy and of the doctrine of the fathers—the unity of the human spirit. Four years after his death, his disciple Arnaldo da Brescia proclaims the Republic in Rome. Such a life animates

men's hearts, which Catholicism, carried along with it, discusses, interprets, criticizes—and the dead letter recoils before the living spirit. For the first and the last time in its history, Catholicism follows that profound movement which, from time to time, reveals to a privileged people the conquests it has made during its silence. At the hour when it looks into itself to observe the rising flood of life, it does not perceive what is happening in the strongest cities of northern France. Sometimes supported by the monarchy that feels them to be a bulwark against the lords, Le Mans first, and Cambrai, then Noyon, Laon, Sens, Amiens, Soissons, Rheims, and Beauvais transform themselves into free communes by the refusal to pay taxes, by proscriptions, and by insurrection, sword in hand. Those were the days when the cadavers of bishops were dragged through the streets.

It matters little that the incentive of the movement toward the commune was the material interest of the people. Opposed to the spirit of the Christianity of the Councils, which made obedience the fundamental principle, the spirit of France, which, by way of the Renaissance and the Encyclopædia, was to reach the Revolution—the spirit of France revealed itself in this movement with a youth and a strength that it never again possessed. For two hundred years it gave to the cities of the Ile-de-France, of Picardy, and of Champagne, a richly flourishing civilization, confused in its appearances, but of an inner rhythm so powerful that it constrained feudalism to take refuge in the country, where it brought about the Jacquerie two or three centuries later, and—under pretext of exterminating heresy—to fall upon the cities of the south, whose culture and growing free spirit it crushed. This was the terrible ransom of the liberty of the north. The foci of energy were still too scattered on our soil, the

Church of Coulombes (xii Century). Detail of a column. (*Louvre.*)

antagonism among the provinces was too sharp for the people to be able to feel solidarity in itself everywhere and in a co-ordinated effort to overthrow the political powers which it still needed to protect itself against the enemy from without.

Filled with the eager life that had been restrained for so long a time the French Commune assigned to each

Arles (xii and xiii Centuries). Façade of Saint-Trophime, detail.

person the work for which he was best fitted. It was an association of strong corporations representing every stratum of society, wherein individual temperaments obeyed no other rules than those of the spontaneous harmony we see in the woods—made up of a hundred thousand trees which plunge into the same soil, are watered by the same rains and fertilized by the same winds. The Commune entered history with a power that gives it that character of necessity which we now recognize as the "Greek miracle" and the "Jewish miracle." The art, formidable and one that expressed it, was born with it in France, and died with it there. It was the French soul delivered into its own

Saint-Genou (Indre) (xii Century). Capitals of the nave.

keeping for the first and the last time. The peoples whom it penetrated with its vitalizing force could accept it and adapt it to their needs—they could not touch its inner principle without, at the same time, ruining its national and social significance. Between the Vosges, the English Channel, and the Loire it was really life, order, truth. It was the barn and the farm and the house of the cities which silhouetted the lacework of its carving and its pinnacles against the sky, the narrow house of earth and of wood bordering the round-backed bridges and the tortuous lanes. It was the thick wall that bit into the rock, the high wall as clear-cut as consciousness, the haughty refuge that dominated the sea, the egoistic abbey where slow lives wore away, to the rhythm of the hours of the church services. It was the little country church around which a few huts were gathered at the foot of the curtain wall under the dungeon that, for ten generations of men, prevented the long and fertile contact of those who lived in its shadow with those whom it confined. It was the great cathedral. It was strength, it was the dream and the need, the belly, the heart, and the armor. The same spontaneous harmony was everywhere, issuing from the desire of the people and burning out at the same time that it did. The crenelated towers, proclaimed, to be sure, in the face of the productive commune, the apparently antagonistic principle of the right of conquest. But with it they proclaimed the same principle of life: they were built by the master mason who directed the work of the cathedral. And the cathedral was born with the communes, grew during their time of maturity, covered itself with statues and stained glass, and then languished and ceased to grow when they declined and died. Noyon, Soissons, Laon, Rheims, Amiens, Sens, Beauvais—wherever we find a great commune the great cathedral

appears, vast and bold in the proportion that the commune is well armed and well established, and in proportion to the vitality of the communal spirit.

The cities of France, during two centuries of relative peace, had torn down their walls. Their houses spread all along the rivers and the roads; the neighboring

Le Thoronet (Var) (xii and xiii Centuries). Cloister of the abbey.

forests were cleared away. In observing the new organs that grew little by little from the re-formed social body—to build dwellings, to pave the streets and stretch chains there, to bring vegetables and wood from the country, to kill animals and shear them, to tan leather and forge iron—men saw that their common interests in these activities increased their strength. The concentration of the social forces made possible the birth of that wonderful hope which is born spon-

taneously in an organism, when all its elements harmonize in the mind which is directed toward a practical purpose that lies within reach. All the guilds together felt that from their instinct there was germi-

Mont-Saint-Michel (xii Century). The gallery.

nating an ever-growing imperious desire which, for its satisfaction, demanded the creation of a central organ that should summarize the effort whose power and necessity were expressed in the ensemble of the Commune. The church of the clergy was too narrow and too dark, the crowd that was rising with the sound of a sea begged for a church of its own; it felt in itself the courage and the knowledge necessary to build that church to its own stature. Its desire was to have the whole great work of building pass, with the material and the moral life, from the hands of the cloistered monk into those of the living people. No longer should

the poor folk who lived in the shadow of the monasteries enter in fear at the hour of the service to hear the voice of the Church in the darkness of the low vault.

Saintes-Maries de la Mer (xii Century). Apse.

The Church should be the common house, the storehouse of abundance, the labor exchange, and the popular theater; it should be the sonorous and luminous

house which the flood of mankind could invade at any hour, a great vessel, capable of containing the whole city, the ark filled with tumult on market days, with dances on feast days, with the sound of the tocsin on the days of revolt, with singing on church days, with the voice of the people on all days.[1]

Some of these great temples, to be sure, spring from the pavement amid the silence of the crowds—in Paris, in Bourges, in Chartres, where the communal spirit did not conquer. But Bourges is a city royal and under the sword of the king; its workers, enriched by the court, escaped the power of the feudal lord. Without anxiety or remorse, the cathedral of Bourges spread out the holiday splendor of its porticos at the base of its enormous, irregular mass. In Paris, also a city royal, Notre Dame covers itself with statues and magnifies the light of the day by the rose windows of its transepts at the moment when the citizens and the merchants strive for freedom. At Chartres, whether the vision of the pure façade and the spire dominates us or whether, on passing through the nave, we are gripped by the sensation of poignant mystery, we know well that we are in the presence of an obscure tragedy of the heart. The prodigious harmony has something disenchanted about it, something in which one divines the torment of an imprisoned conscience. How could Roman austerity tolerate in its shadow the radiance, given forth by the sensuous glory of the race of statues which guards the enigma of the nave? Here theocratic will clashes with popular desire without either one becoming aware of it, and from the unconscious conflict there spurts up an invisible flame—the dull,

[1] The greater part of the ideas expressed in this chapter have already been defended with profound logic and authority by Viollet-le-Duc in his *Dictionnaire d' Architecture*. It must be said, however, that his writing suffers from an excess of laical narrowness.

CHARTRES (XII Century). North portal of the cathedral.

mystical, agonizing beauty of a great idea that contains the secret of a world and cannot formulate itself.

IV

Everywhere else the multitude is master of the works. The honest master builder, to whom the Commune and the Bishop turn, knows practically nothing save his trade. Behind him is the confused Byzantine-Romanesque tradition which he possesses imperfectly; before him is a problem to be solved: to build an edifice vast enough to contain the inhabitants of a city. He knows his material well, the stone of France, powdery, watery, and easy to work. He has his compass, his water level, his plumb line, and his square. Around him are good workmen, of the same spirit as himself, filled with faith, not in the least disturbed by worry as to social questions or by doubt as to religion. He possesses that clear good sense, that free and direct logic, which later brought out of the same soil such men as Rabelais, Montaigne, Molière, La Fontaine, Rameau, Diderot, and Voltaire. A new function appears, so complex that it absorbs the life of the century. For the new organ to adapt itself to it, nothing more is needed than that the master builder consent to be a man of his time, like the least of his companions.

Whatever the force in the ascending movement of the French churches, whatever their lyrism, their perfect intelligence lies too deep within them to make its impression at once. Their whole form is determined by the ogive window that hides itself proudly in the upper shadows of the nave. It has not revealed to us the subtle passage that leads a French or a Norman mason to isolate in the Romanesque church the projections from the ribbed vault and to raise its lateral

edges by means of the angular window which the Crusaders had seen in the Orient. But it was that window which overcame the round arch and the vertical weight that crushed the vessel. Everything is to radiate from the ogive—the drop of its diagonal ribbing on to the columns that spring up to separate the three naves, the entire vault that is inscribed in their intervals, and the flying buttress that carries off obliquely the thrust of the vault. Everywhere else one finds the immense expanses of glass through which the light penetrates. . . . The logic is that of the skeleton, wherein all pressures are balanced and transmitted; it is the image of the absolute transported into the perishable order of the scattered elements of life. Between the flying buttress and the vault, the edifice is like the carcass of a gigantic cetacean suspended in space by

CHARTRES (XII Century). The month of July. (*Cathedral.*)

iron hooks to permit the light of heaven to traverse it in every direction. It seems to float in the air.[1]

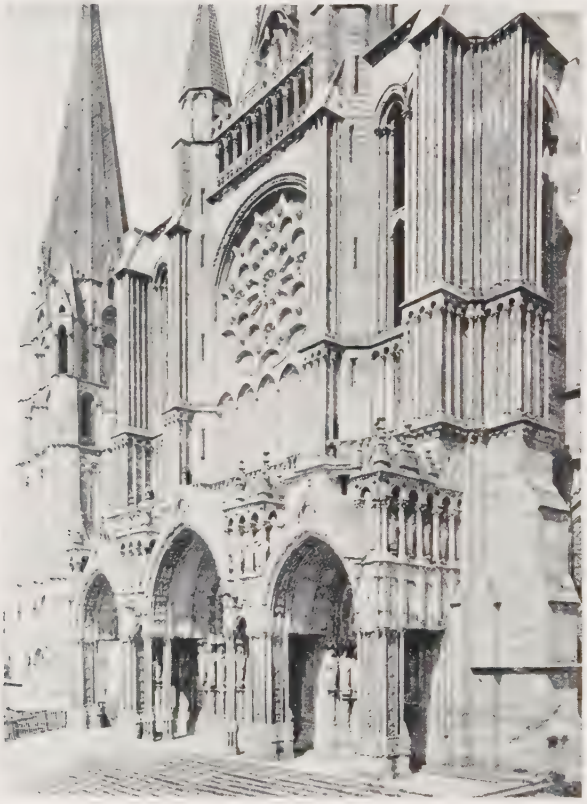
Gothic architecture was opposed to leaving anything in darkness. Indeed, it died of its love of the light. Sens, Beauvais, Laon, Soissons, Amiens, Bourges (in spite of its five naves) are full of light, like our modern markets of iron and glass. But in these cathedrals there is, of course, the necessary framework which made some dark places; there is the stone skeleton work of the rose window, the leads which hold the stained glass, the wire netting which protects it, the

[1] The ogive, of which an example is cited in England, at Durham, about 1104, appears for the first time in France, probably, about 1115, at Morienval, near Soissons and Noyon, between the Ile-de-France, Picardy, and Champagne, where, through Saint-Denis and Notre Dame, Amiens and Beauvais, Rheims, Laon, Sens, etc., it saw the birth of the most numerous and most beautiful architectural works consequent upon it. Who discovered it? Several master builders, perhaps, each one contributing a new idea, from the association of which the ogive was born spontaneously. Here is one of the most surprising characteristics of the Middle Ages in the Occident, and one that it shares with hardly any other art than that of ancient Egypt and India. Of all the image makers, scarcely a name has come down to us, and if we know who some dozens of architects were, it has required patient researches or chance to bring forth their names from the municipal account books that slept in our archives. This is an anonymous art, and, consequently, it is collective and disinterested, it is the *social art*. These men thought of nothing but the accomplishment of their task, and not one of them dreamed of laying claim to being the father of the most original creation in architecture since the vault of the Assyrians.

Guillaume de Sens, who was one of the greatest of the constructors and who was brought to England to build the nave of Canterbury, passed as the inventor of the ogive for a long time. He was, doubtless, one of the first to apply it to the construction of an edifice—the cathedral of Sens—whose whole structure it determines. But it seems to have received almost as complete an application, for an ensemble, with the building of the choir of Saint-Denis (1144), and in some churches of a transitional character dating from that period—Noyon, Lisieux, Le Mans, etc. In any case, it was in the Ile-de-France that, before the middle of the twelfth century, the architects systematized a process of construction which permitted Jean d'Orbais to build Rheims, Robert de Luzarches to build Amiens, Pierre de Montereau to build the Sainte-Chapelle, and a hundred others in every part of France and Europe to erect buildings of a unity of structure that is absolute and of a variety of aspects that is inexhaustible.

CHARTRES (XII Century). Head of a man. (*Cathedral.*)

dirt of centuries, due to all the old dust that has heaped up. . . . When the cathedral is dark, it is because the master builder has miscalculated his effort, because he



CHARTRES (XII and XIII Centuries). South transept of the cathedral.

expected the building to yield more than it could, because he wanted to crowd too many people into it, as in Paris, where galleries press down on the four lateral

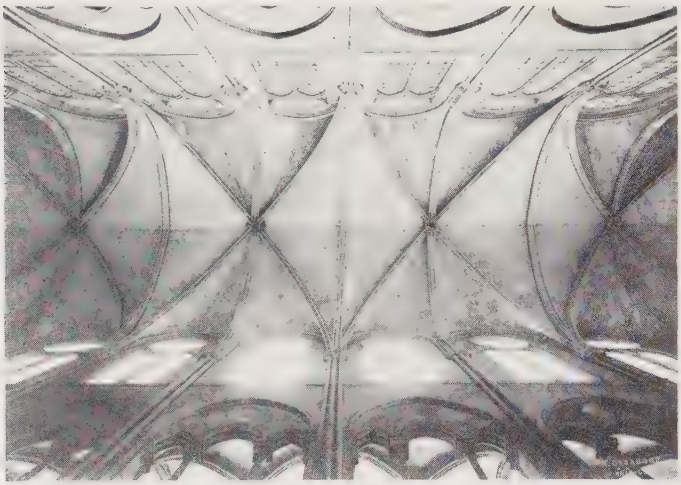
CHARTRES (XII and XIII Centuries). Transept of the cathedral.

naves. The object of the stained glass was not to darken the nave but to glorify the light, whose glow scintillated with the richness of powdered jewels. And this glass was used not only in the churches but for the rooms of the châteaux and for the houses of the middle class. The memory of the carpets hung up in the mosques filled the minds of the men, who were returning from the Orient, with visions transfigured by enthusiasm and regret. They opened the side of the wall to set into it a translucent painting, a fresco shot through by flames, illumined by the heavens. The stained glass offered to the pale light of the north its flaming matrix so that the sun should give a warmer caress to the stone that rose everywhere. Its azures, its dark blues, its saffron and golden yellows, its oranges, its vinous or purple reds, and its dark greens streaked the nave with the blood of Christ and the sapphire of the sky, with the russet of the autumn grapevines, and with the emerald of the distant seas and of the meadows round about. In the depths of the chapels of the apse, where the spot made by the candles caused the darkness to tremble, the light of the windows weakened only to accumulate around the sanctuary, the agonizing vagueness and the voluptuousness of its mystery. When, on one of those gray days of the Ile-de-France, one enters Notre Dame to wait for the sun, one knows when it has come out by the blond inundation that suddenly invades the nave, renders it aërial and golden, and little by little touches and makes dazzling the very ribbing which, under their rigid palm ornaments, suspends the shadow of the forests. At evening, when the darkness is almost nocturnal in the vast interior whose vaults one sees hovering high up like the wings of a great bird of the night, one thing alone remains luminous—the glass of the windows. The dying light from outside spatters the black pillars and the pavement which has

SAINT-YRIEIX (Corréze) (XIII Century). Nave of the church, detail.

disappeared, with a fiery shower, more intense and more glowing in proportion as the darkness increases. The rose windows gather up the last reflections of the sun that has set to illuminate the shadows with them.

Everything that gives the cathedral its meaning, everything that determines its aspect—the irresistible



Paris (xiii Century). Vault of the nave. (*Cathedral.*)

rise of its lines, the balancing of the curves that raise it above the cities—everything is brought about by the desire for light; and the desire for light increased among its architects at the same time that they became more familiar with the handling of its curves and its lines. Never did an edifice so truthful proclaim its function with such simplicity. At every point the bones were just beneath the flesh; each one recognized its role: there was not a recess, there was not a projection which did not justify its presence. The fixed framework of the exterior, the immense parallel arches which

start up everywhere to suspend the central nave or to radiate to the apse, carry the building up into space and cradle it there, like the articulated members of a

PARIS (XIII Century). Triforium, wall, and vault.
(*Cathedral.*)

gigantic animal. Every one of its organs, from the haughtiest to the most obscure, participates in its power—the humble ornament, the flower that varies a plane that would be too bare without it, the slight bas-

relief that gives movement to a profile, the small belfries that load the pinnacles to increase the strength of the piles which catch the thrust of the flying buttresses, the niches for statues hollowing out the buttresses wherever there is no pressure, the gargoyles that spout the rain water away from the building so that it shall not gnaw the stone, the long grooved columns on the body of the pillars themselves, giving to the supports of the vaults that nervous and sustained spring which causes them to spread out at their summit with the ease of a sheaf.

Nowhere else has sculptured ornament become so much a part of the edifice. In India the statue is incorporated in the building because both, at the same time, grow out of a pantheistic conception of life which sweeps the builders and the statue makers into its own headlong movement. Here, not only does the unity of conception, of traditions, and beliefs carry in the same current all who share in the work, but every statue, every carved column, every branch, or fruit on the wall is there to give more balance and solidity to the ensemble. The ornament gives animation and movement and carries off into space everything that would serve to rob the cathedral of mobility and to bind it to the soil.

Bare in the beginning, at Sens, at Saint-Denis, in the first tier of the cathedral of Paris and at Soissons, bare as a race abounding with life, the cathedral was covered in a century with the forms which this race had found on its pathway. The porches, the tympanums, the lintels, the galleries of colonnettes, the high towers —sonorous organs raising in a single flight their thickets of close-set stones, everything became part of the miracle, and this whole soil, which had been barren before, sprouted with trembling bas-reliefs, with the carving of the foliage that seemed ready to burst with sap—

Tour (Calvados) (XIII Century). Belfry of the church.

and in a thousand powerful statues quivered the life of a people. In the mist or in the sunshine, the world of the painted images caused the façades, from their severe base to their sweeping towers, to partake of the movement of the black streets into which the neighboring countryside penetrates unceasingly, with the hucksters, the traders, their horses and sheep, with the boatmen and the market gardeners who bring vegetables and wood to the city. On days of prayer, the people ask the stone symbols for the human significance of the mystic emotion that pervades the multitude of pure and gentle beings which surround the cathedral of Chartres. On rainy days, people take refuge under the porches of Notre Dame—the three porches inscribed in the bare wall, which is not more sober and simple and firmly built than they, and the stories that the image makers in their sheltered workshops have been telling for a century are discussed by the citizens. On feast days and in fine weather, people stop to look at the way in which the façade of Amiens is blossoming, as if the reapers and the vintagers on its doors were covering it with vine branches and sheaves—from the embroidered galleries to the flames of the great rose window. On fair-days, people at the top of the towers of Laon would see the oxen bending to their work in the fields. On coronation days, or at times of royal pomp, when the processions defile between the rows of narrow houses where the tapestries hang, people follow the harmony and the tumult of the marchers and are engulfed with the latter in the five porches of Bourges that shimmer with their painted sculptures; while at Rheims, the sculptures are carried on up to the summit of the cathedral, from which there pours the incessant torrent of the forms and colors of nature.

But inside—not an image. The nave would lose something of its sonority, its grandeur, its light. The

vault, the generating principle, is bare, and only the capital of the columns is permitted to flower. The long, slender shafts, the long ribbing that ascends and descends to outline the stained glass of the windows, the absolute lines that converge and that answer one

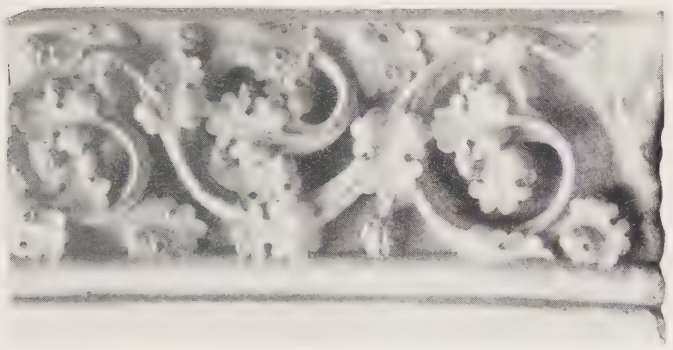
Flavigny (Côte-d'Or) (xiii Century). Capital, choir of the abbey.

another, the pure radiance of the rose window—everything has the abstract force and the nakedness of the mind. And everywhere it is function that determines form. The armed castle is a church turned inside out, its exterior bare for purposes of resistance, and covered with frescoes and carpets within, well supplied

with carved wood furniture and with forged iron for the delight of the eye and for repose. The only French cathedral in the ogive style, whose exterior is bare and whose form presents a hostile mass, was built at Albi in a spirit of defiance and combat—it is a fortress rising in a block to surround the sanctuary of the spirit with armor. In the south, the Roman majesty of the wall is retained, and even, at certain moments, enhanced. Especially in those places where the Romanesque spirit and the ogival spirit fuse, at Saintes-Maries de la Mer, at Aigues-Mortes, at Albi, at Agde, at the Château of the Popes in Avignon, a sublime art will appear. In the rhythmical alternation of the massive wall that mounts straight upward and of the offset inscribed directly in its thickness to make openings for the superimposed windows under the proud ogive at the top, it is so lofty, so bare, so measured and sober that, beside it—whether a church or a fortress—the Romanesque temple seems crushed or heavy or frail and the French cathedral seems overloaded with the decoration on its exterior.

In the architecture of the ogive, as in the Romanesque architecture, several schools have been isolated. And, in fact, it is as easy to distinguish in one's first glance at the ogival building, the sobriety and the measure of the Ile-de-France and the Valois, the gayety, the animation, the truculence, and the verve of Picardy and Champagne, the square and rugged force of Brittany, the profusion and complexity of Normandy, as, in the Romanesque construction, one can distinguish the patience of the workmen of Poitoux, the gathered power of the Auvergnats, the tense elegance of the men of Provence, and the vigor and the fineness of the men of Périgord. It is also easy to recognize the meeting of the two great styles in the stately eloquence of the Burgundians. But in one group as in the other and

despite the general tendency which, in the south, gives predominance to the spiritual, abstract, structural, and didactic element and in the north to all the gradations of the living, anecdotal, and picturesque element, despite the predominance, in a word, of sculpture in the north and architecture in the south, a constant interpenetration of local styles, of epochs, and of influences



Paris (xiii Century). Grapevine. (*Cathedral.*)

from without transforms the whole land of France into a forest of stone designed and worked, and to compare with it there is perhaps only the growth that India brought forth from her miraculous soil. And we may add that Indian art and the art of the Khmers and the Javanese, and Byzantine art as well as that of the Arabs, and the art of Greece as well that of Rome, by direct or indirect connection, by reason or intuition, by the contact of thought or by chance, seem to gather here from every place on earth to summarize and co-ordinate themselves for a century in the ever-alert sensibility and the ready intelligence which characterize France. From one end of the land to the other, a wonderful variety of sensation and expression becomes easily a

part of the spiritual unity of will and faith. Whether the Romanesque temple is carved like an ivory or whether it is simple, whether its tower is square, polygonal, or round, solid or open to the air by its juxtaposed windows, whether the belfry rises straight as a cry or whether it curves like the line of a lamentation, whether the apse is circular or whether it forms a polyhedron, whether the arches are multiplied on the moving surface or barely indicated at the summit of the straight walls that are as fierce as ramparts, everywhere the majesty and the force of the doctrine impregnate the expressive surfaces with the savor and the rhythm of life. Sometimes, on the ogival façades, the great silent planes are displayed almost bare between bare buttresses or, on the contrary, the buttresses are fluted like organ pipes, as if to accentuate their vertical flight toward the sky, and the façades are covered by a lacework of leaves and branches. Sometimes the porches are inscribed in the walls, at other times they bristle with pediments, spires, and pinnacles. The rose windows may be circular or flame-shaped, the number and the disposition of the towers vary endlessly—now they are cut into by high windows, now designed with clusters of colonnettes like wheat sheaves, or again they pass by insensible transitions from the square to the polygon and from the polygon to the cone. But everywhere the flood of the animated forms and innumerable aspects of life permits the logic of the function and the rationalism of the mind to appear freely. Even—and here the miracle is perhaps more surprising—when three centuries and four or five styles have mingled the Romanesque and the Gothic in a simple monument, the whole indivisible world of sentiments and sensations that it presents enters in a mass, and forever, into the immutable order of the mind.

Bagé (Ain) (xii and xiii Centuries). Belfry of the church.

V

In reality, when France was covering with living flesh a framework so logical that it fixed the form of the monument in its every detail, she was still pursuing

Laon (xiii Century). Capital in the triforium. (*Cathedral.*)

the conquest of herself. The French mind is of all the most structure-loving, but the structure must be simple in the proportion that its surface is mobile and rich in gradations, it must remain close to her soil, to her

Amiens (xii to xiv Century). The cathedral.

rivers, and to the winds that cross her skies. The men of this land have always loved to give to matter the image of their visions. The first engraved and carved objects which the world knows appeared on the territory that extends from the Atlantic to the Pyrenees and to the Cévennes. The Gauls beat, forged, and molded bronze before the arrival of the Legions. The Greco-Latin genius became vibrant each time that it touched this soil.

And yet before sculpture had departed from the cloister entirely, the saints, both men and women, had been far-away gods whom the people could barely see at the summit of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Once they had gained the street they lived there. The local god, the god of works and of days, the god of the fountains and the woods, the genius, who participated in all the acts of the agricultural, social, and industrial life of the people, joined the company of the saints—without any one perceiving it. Sculpture was suddenly invaded everywhere by a moral sentiment, which was as familiar and as penetrating and as simple as the living activity of humanity always is; and, without visible connection, this sentiment continued the oldest memories of man. Its actions were those of confession and protection and health, and their attraction was irresistible. Hands sought other hands and found them, faces bent toward other faces, from which emanated the gentleness that men show toward each other when they need one another. The virgin, deified against the desire of the clergy, carried her child in the crowd and showed him to the poor people.

Surely, those were good Christians who sculptured those round torsos, those flanks, swelling with child, which are lifted up by the bulk of the little one, those long limbs, nervous or full, under the woolen dress, and those good smiling faces which they copied in the

workshop from the women who brought them their soup. If all they really loved in Christianity was its tender human myths, they accepted without question its belief in the supernatural, and, in consequence, they were not too severe with themselves for the acts which they committed. As long as they did their work well, they considered that their sin of gluttony had the advantage of renewing their strength and that their sins of incontinence compensated for many other disagreeable things. The churchmen were no more offended than the laymen by the ingenuous wantonness of the stories which the popular imagination never ceased to bring forth. We must remember that in these centuries, morals were not very edifying.[1] Almost all of the priests themselves had concubines, and not one of them made a secret of it. Life was too rich in rejuvenated strength to be restrained by any dikes. The man of this time brought to the service of the church his greatest and his simplest love; but it was the spirit which he adored, and the very power of his faith set free his power of action by rescuing him from

School of Rheims (xiii Century). Angel, detail. (*Louvre.*)

[1] See in Lavisse's *Histoire de France:* "The Thirteenth Century," by M. Langlois.

the letter of the law. There was many a nudge of the elbow, many a slap exchanged during the preaching, and sometimes it was the priest who got the drubbing. And now it was no longer monks who continually represented the virtues on the lintels and the tympanums. Much more frequently it was the virtues, with the enchanted smile of a feminine face, that welcomed the poor people. It was thought very natural to see demons pushing into the caldrons a gesticulating troop of soldiers, bishops, and kings, all shuddering with fear. The people, in France, was too sure of itself not to pardon injuries, for it said what it thought with perfect candor, and although its hell was more comic than terrifying, it opened the gates, in its malice, to those who did not respect the task the accomplishment of which they pretended was their sacred mission.

The Almighty seldom appeared in the statuary of the churches. The poor image makers did not aspire that high. They were unable to create that which they had not seen. They did not lack imagination, certainly, and even a vague, universal, and confused culture. But their imagination moved within limits—immense and multiform, be it said—of the life that surrounded them, and their instinct as artists was too imperious to permit their theological and legendary culture to furnish them anything but pretexts for the manifestation of that instinct. Our Lady the Virgin stepped out of the stone alive, because the image of maternity, in this period of superabundant life, was everywhere. And if the saints and the angels surrounded the portals, it was because those who suffered saw faces of kindness and faces of hope bending over them daily in their distress.

The Church, in the course of its defensive organization, had turned aside, to the profit of its external power, the impulsion of sentiment from which Christianity

had sprung. The France of the thirteenth century restored this impulsion of sentiment in the full life of humanity. Under the pressure of this inner force, the

Rheims (xiii Century). A knight. (*Cathedral.*)

old world of theology cracked everywhere. Christianity, which until then had dominated life, was dominated by it and carried along in its movement. Moving on a higher plane than that of the Semitic idea of Saint Paul, who had prepared life for its explosion by forcing

repose upon it, contrary to the discipline of Rome which, for a thousand years, had been raising dikes to protect it against the anarchical forces from without,

RHEIMS (XIII Century). Winter. (*Cathedral.*)

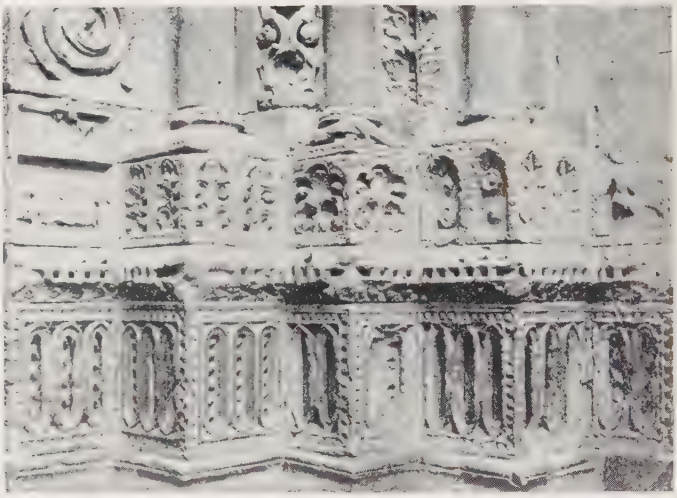
life once more joined in the fraternal spirit of Him who was born in a stable, who was followed by troops of the poor, who received adulterous women, and who spoke to the flowers; it did so because man was emerging

from a social state harder than that of the old world and because an insurrection of virile tenderness was becoming the universal need.

RAMPILLON (Seine-et-Marne) (XIII Century). Detail of the base.

The civilizations of antiquity wept at their decline. Their sorrow has seemed declamatory and grimacing because life was leaving them. The Middle Ages, in which life was rising, mastered their suffering. They were happy, as happy as the old world in its full sweep upward, and for them pity was never more than one element in the generated energy of life. They did not even realize how courageous they were when they stretched out their two hands to all who asked for them. Without any effort, they found, in the fulfillment of their daily task, the social principle of Christianity, which the fathers of the Church had sought in a theocratic organization that was momentarily necessary to protect the growth of the new peoples, but that was a drawback to the manifestation of their original thought.

This social character defines French sculpture. When we see it from our distance, to be sure, when we see it in its ensemble from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, it strongly recalls the progression of the schools of antiquity from archaism to academism,



ROUEN (XIII Century). Base and shafts of a door of the cathedral.

with their passage through a point of equilibrium wherein science and sentiment, rising to their loftiest certitude, shine from the same focus. Romanesque art has the smiling strength and the rhythmical stiffness of the sixth century of Greece; the art of the thirteenth century is calm and mature like that with which Phidias and his precursors affirmed their complete self-possession. Afterward, in France as in Greece, virtuosity —descriptive, naturalistic, and picturesque—gains the upper hand little by little. Doubtless, the essential

difference is that Gothic sculpture does not tend above all to the realization of that balance of volumes by which the statue makers of Olympia and of the Parthenon passed from one form to another form, from one

Rheims (xiii Century). Caryatid. (*Cathedral.*)

idea to another idea, without leaving a trace by which the mind could follow the course that had been taken: it had to enter, with the sculptors, into the consciousness and the need of the universal harmony. When Gothic sculpture seizes this balance, we seem to be in the presence of an isolated attempt; a solitary in-

dividual seems to have made his impressive appearance in the midst of a murmuring throng. . . . The Greek artists almost invariably spread out the inner life of

Rampillon (Seine-et-Marne) (xiii Century). The Carpenter. Altar screen of the church.

the stone in rhythmic waves over the whole extent of the planes, to make all the figures participate in the cosmic equilibrium. The Frenchman almost invariably concentrates it in a bowed forehead, in a raised chin, a shoulder, a dress, an elbow, a haunch or a knee,

Rheims (xiii Century). Figures from the porch. (*Cathedral.*)

which often breaks the line that one anticipates, so that we may see more clearly the direct, actual, and simple meaning of the action that he wants to express. . . . In the sculptures of Olympia and in the Fates of the Parthenon there was, doubtless, the dawn of a modeling similar in spirit to the Gothic. But the desire for harmony dominated everything.

The contours of the Gothic statue are less defined than they were among the Egyptians and less subtle than among the Greeks. They are more varied and more living, for the light changes more frequently and is more diffused, and above all because they express a world of moral needs which neither the Greeks nor the Egyptians could feel. Never had shadows and lights been distributed with such an understanding of their psychological value. Never had the material been worked with an emotion so concrete, never had a more profound, a more complete, and a more gentle radiance emanated from it, from the full and broadly treated forms which exhibit the material to our eyes. Never had the necessity for effort been accepted with a more joyous soul by a youth with more courage to live its life, though it was better prepared than the younger races for the misfortune that awaited it. Certain statues of Rheims remind one of the Apollo of Olympia, by the rise into the light, from which their brow seems to emerge. The pure spring water that issues from the rock of Hellas seems to flow over the sides and the limbs of the statues of women, which watch over the portal above the transept of Chartres. Once more, men have lent their heroism to the gods.

It would be erroneous to conclude that even the greatest master builders and image makers among the French had ever possessed philosophic ideas so elevated as those of the sculptors from whom the Greek thinkers derived the life of the mind. But outside of

the geographical conditions which so sensibly differentiated northern France with its humidity and its coolness from the arid and burnt land of Greece, life

Séez (xiii Century). Splaying of the door of the cathedral.

had been harder in the Middle Ages than in the century of Pericles, war and misery had made it more necessary for the masses to bring about an active solidarity, and man was more profoundly necessary to man. Moreover, these different conditions of natural

and social life revealed themselves unexpectedly in the atmosphere of sentimental legend that Christianity created little by little. It is indubitable that the Greek sculptor who tore the ancient world from its exhausted rhythms, was intellectually as superior to the mason of the cathedral, as the "Prometheus" of Æschylus or the "Antigone" of Sophocles is to a thirteenth-century mystery play; but it is certain that the mason of the cathedral easily rejoined him in the universal eurhythmy, because he was an element of the monumental symphony which the instinct, common to a whole throng, causes to spurt from its heart.

VI

The entire people in the Middle Ages, with all that it knew, all that it desired, and all that it confusedly dreamed, built its temple, the house of its reality and its hope, as it was building up at the same time, through the freedom of the Commune, its right to live, the right for future ages to conquer through thought. It was not, as has been claimed, that each inhabitant of the city and the country contributed his stone to the pile. But the corporations which worked at it, the carpenters, the masons, the stonecutters, the glassmakers, the plasterers, the leadworkers, and the painters, all plumbed the lowest depths of the people whose forebodings and needs they drew forth wholeheartedly. The master builder laid out the plan, and distributed the work; then each man, with his instinct for independent action, animated a capital, sculptured an image, framed in lead the holiday splendor of a piece of stained glass, and set in line, between the diagonal ribbing, the little stones cut by hand that suspended the vault a hundred or a hundred and fifty feet above the soil. The cathedral lived so completely the life of

its builders that it changed at the same time they did, and one generation would erect a tier in the pointed style on top of a tier of round arches, while another would abandon the arm of a transept already half

The descent from the Cross, ivory (XIII Century). (*Louvre.*)

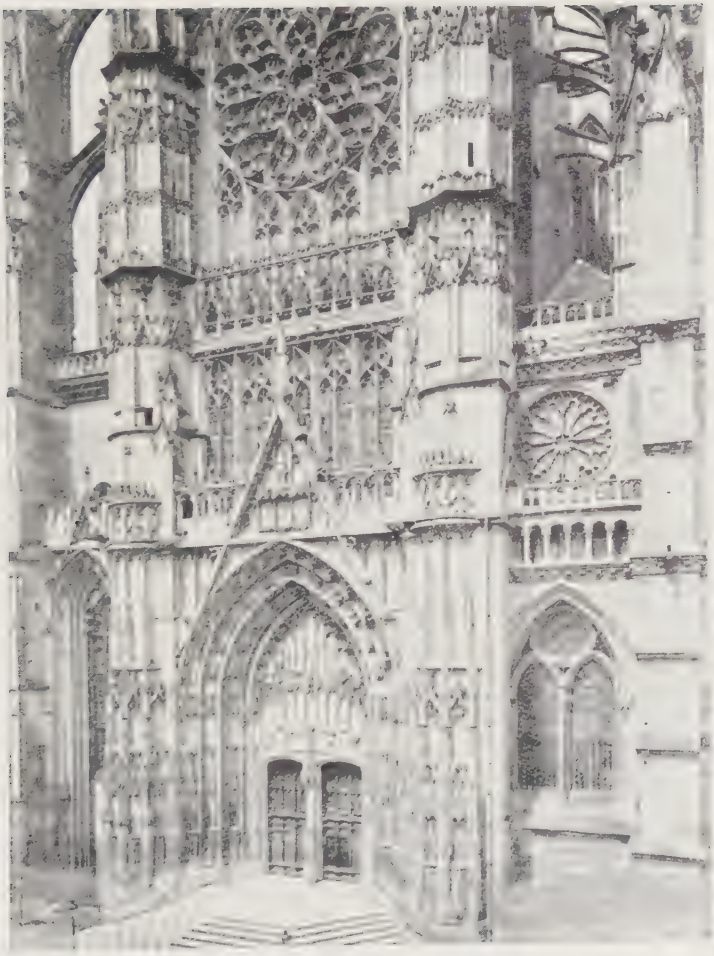
constructed, would add a crown of chapels, change the profile of the towers, multiply or leave them unfinished, or would set a rose window flaming at the front of a Romanesque nave which had been relieved of its vault. The cathedral rose, sank, and spread out with our feelings and our desires.

Hence its close, rich unity wherein, as in a crowd or

in nature, all the different forms derived their solidarity from the current of the same sap. Hence the liberty, the sweep, and the violence, and the sweetness of the hymn which these innumerable voices chanted and with which it still trembles. It was an Encyclopædia,

Troyes (xiii Century). Gargoyle. (*Church of Saint-Urbain.*)

chiseled with love from the stuff of which France is made. The Bible story and the Christian myth, translated into active life, were lost in the rising tide of the expressive forms which told, with their thousand mingling voices, everything that was contained in the soul, now mischievous, now naïve, now lyrical, now genial, of the men who had heard these voices awakening within them. The good knights were bringing back the dragons and chimeras from the Orient. The newly acquired strength of the imagination made more concrete the figures of the vampires and the man wolves, the moralizing beasts, and the talking beasts of the old fables in verse. As the image makers had not seen the legendary kings, saints, or bishops, they



Beauvais (xiii Century). South transept of the cathedral.

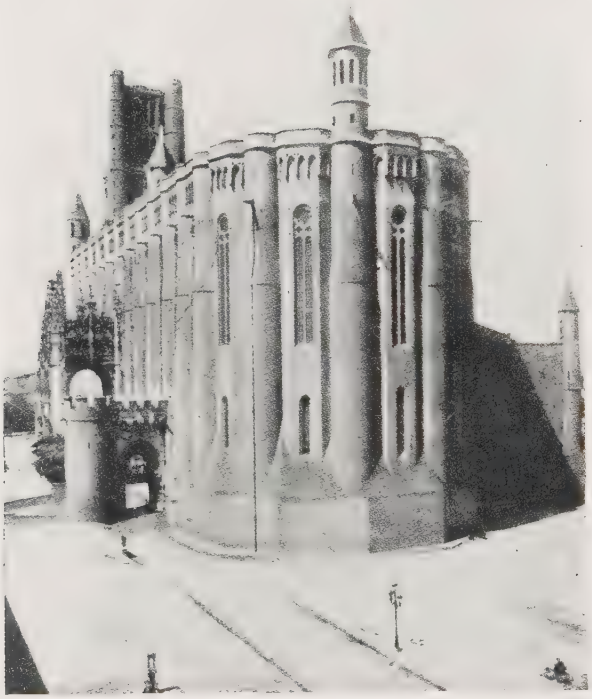
asked the men in the street to furnish them with the most characteristic faces. The cathedral trembled with the noise of the crafts and the forges. Here are the peasants sowing their wheat, reaping their grain, pressing out their grapes or their apples. Here are horses, asses, and oxen breaking their furrow, or dragging their cart. The goats and the sheep show no astonishment when, at the turn of a pillar, they meet an elephant, a rhinoceros, a hippopotamus, or a king or the Magi on their camels. Gothic sculpture is an image of freedom, uniting man's future with the far-away memories which he had saved from the shipwreck of the ancient world. Whether the cathedral remains awake or goes to sleep, these memories are ever-present and living, with a confused and murmuring life full of the songs of birds, of the sound of springs, and of the swarming of the creatures under the moss. About the capitals, the whole plant world sprouted with great buds, then with leaves of pure outline which earthy hands laid on the half-dressed stone; then came the overflow of vine branches with their leaves, and thick tree stems bearing all the leaves of France and sending forth their sound in the wind that animated the organ of the towers: the vine, the rosebush, the strawberry plant, the willow, the sage, the mallow, the clover, the celery, the cabbage, the thistle, the parsley, the watercress, the fern—the leaves of France dug out from matter in such a transport of the senses that they changed at every moment into vague moving forms—lips, breasts, and folds of flesh where universal life hesitated in its primitive appearances. The bas-reliefs that grew out of the walls seem the very flower of the stone; they seem to make concrete and visible, little by little, the forms that it contains in germ, so well does the image mingle with its surroundings, with its background of misty space.

There is nothing that more clearly reveals the futility of the old opposition between architecture and the so-called imitative arts than the French cathedral, where the living surfaces cover a living skeleton. There is nothing more superficial than the ordinary definition of plastics, whose function is not to imitate the world of

Aigues-Mortes (xiii Century). Ramparts.

forms, but to seize in it the relationships which architecture precisely expresses most abstractly. It is not only its sculptured or painted ornamentation which causes architecture to re-enter the life of earth and sky, it is its first origin, the instinctive repetition that it presents of the great architecture of nature from which the human mind gathers up the elements of logical revelation that we call invention. All the vaults have evolved from the forms that were taught us by the cupola of the heavens and the droop of the long branches; all the columns are trees, all the walls are

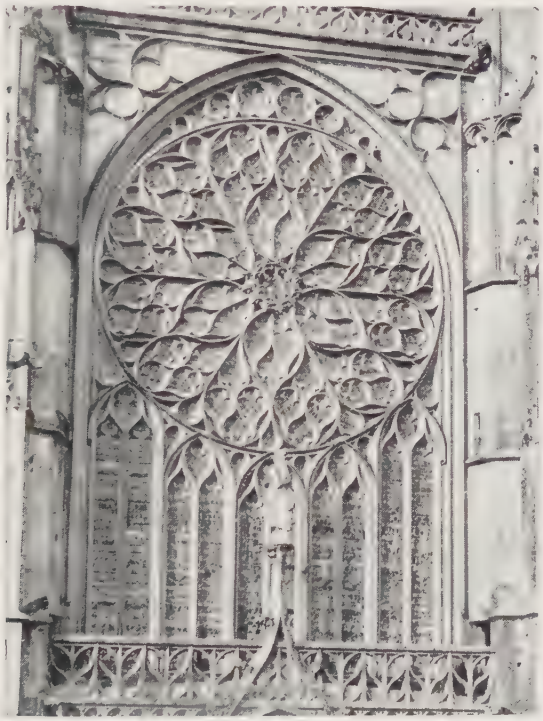
rocks or cliffs, and the roof is spread out only to permit the people dwelling beneath it to shelter themselves from the winds of the night—it slopes only to carry



Albi (xiii Century). The cathedral.

off the rain to the earth, which drinks it. The northern countries, which are wooded and whose light is diffused, impose ornate façades on our imagination; the southern countries, which are bare and whose light is dazzling,

dictate long, pure lines: the Romanesque endured in the south. Water penetrates the stone of the north, changes it, mingles it with the damp mold, with the mosses and rotten leaves. The marble of the south is



SENS. Rose window of the transept of the cathedral.

so saturated with the sun that little by little it becomes a focus of light, a source of heat as life-giving as that which concentrates autumn and summer in fruit. Everything attaches to a soil the edifice built of the stone which was drawn from that soil; it belongs to it

as the waters and the winds and the color of the sky and the crops and the accustomed rhythm of the seasons. Under the pavement of the naves we get the forest underground, the thick columns plunge to the darkness of the crypt, to permit the vertical sweep of their shafts and the spreading of their branches and leaves to take root in the earth. In the French cathedral, in its long, pale columns, we get the tremulousness of the forests of alburnum and of birch, the light airy forests of Picardy and Champagne, and we see their illumined branches in the flames of the stained glass. When twilight floods the nave, making the pillars seem larger in its glow and thrusting back the solemn vaults even deeper into the mystery which darkens the gold of the waning light, one thinks of our oak forests. And the light vapor of our skies, permeating the whole mass of the air, mingling the confused movement of the ornamental forms with the silence of their depths, penetrating the openwork of the towers, and casting a veil of blond smoke over the conflagration of the stained glass, seems to lift the cathedral above the slopes and the plains, as it carries the heavy water of the winding rivers into the upper air, where we see the faint tremor of the trees whose leaves, shorn by autumn, are merged by the rain with the mud of the roads. Branches move, sounds arise, and a whispering begins again when the wind has died away. At Coutances, the lines of the spires of the central tower and of the polygonal belfries are characterized by the ascending movement with which they launch upward everywhere. They penetrate space with a flight so pure and so bare that their points are lost in it like voices. Laon, from its base to the top of its towers, is green with moss and wild plants, the buttresses of Beauvais, which spring up to a height three times greater than that of the woods of the country, have the sound of a forest in a

Coutances (xiii Century). Spire of the cathedral.

storm, and the old spire of Chartres is a golden flame hung in the mist.

VII

Nothing in this social and natural expression is foreign to the earth and to the people from which it came forth spontaneously. And the unity of the symphony is the more impressive, through the vast number of voices that entered it, for song and prayer,

Cahors (xiv Century). The Valentré Bridge.

to murmur, to weep, and to laugh, and to combine the changing melody of the lacework of stone and glass and their rays of light with the intermittent thunder of the bells and with the hum of the sonorous naves, where the plain song rises and falls. The cathedral often sheltered the neighboring university[1] and never entirely relinquished to it the cult of the intellectual

[1] The councils of the University of Paris were held at St. Julien le Pauvre.

life, for the students met the artisans under its vaults to commune with them in the collective and confused elaboration of farces, mystery plays, and moralities; and so, even before the university, it presented a powerful summary of the idea of the century and of the images of life. It formulated for us those turbulent schools where four or five nations came for their instruction, where the overlapping elements of all kinds collaborate—the master with his disciples, the Greek philosophers with the fathers of the Church, and what is taught with what is learned. The immeasurable mind of Aristotle, from which revolutionary thought claimed its authority against the theologians, would have recognized in the disordered unity and the rich material of this time the irruption of the genius of the senses which every thousand years arises from the depths of the peoples to save the world from the dangers of pure abstraction.

Men had cursed the flesh,

Amiens (xiv Century). The gilded Virgin. (*Cathedral.*)

disdained form, and repressed the desire to love them for what they teach us. And they had continued to do this for so long a time that on the day when that desire could no longer be restrained, it

Tours (xiv Century). Corbel. (*Old cathedral.*)

changed the axis of life, revealed life to itself, and finally stifled it. There was such an overflowing of forms, men were so drunk with sensations, that not only was the Christian idea of purification annihilated, but the art which had come to protest against that idea was devoured. It died because it had satisfied, with too great a violence, the needs that had given it birth. In less than three hundred years the French mind followed the course that leads from Sens or from Noyon, from Notre Dame, from Chartres,

from Beauvais—from naked logic, unity, harmony, and the ever-present impulse of sobriety and strength, to Rheims, the magnificent, sensual orgy, and to Rouen, the frail and flamboyant death struggle. Sculpture,

BOURGES (XIV Century). The Saved. (*Cathedral.*)

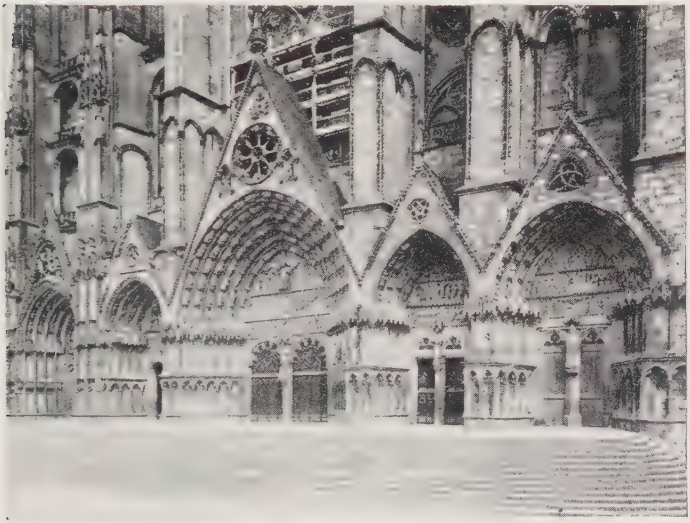
affixed to the walls at first, incorporated in the walls, later on, detached itself from the walls; and once the dissociation had begun, it accentuated itself rapidly, until the final anarchy. From the fourteenth century on, it expresses scarcely more than that which one finds in an individual portrait having such characteristics as penetration, health, cordiality, and self-confidence. And then the image maker knows too much, he handles his chisel with such ease that he can watch it toying

with the material, and the force that once governed his heart has entirely passed into his hand. The lines of the cathedral become complicated and entangled; they lose their meaning; its vaults are encumbered with supplementary ribbing which will soon be cut up into fragments by useless ornament. The cathedral disappears under the profusion of the detail, its supports are weakened by being hollowed out with carving; every day its solid parts are diminished and a greater risk of a collapse is incurred by making room for the great windows that were invading it more and more. When it had appeared, the world was dying of darkness, of solitude and silence; the cathedral revealed light, form, and tumult to the world, and was to die as a result.

Hence the explosive and transitory character of the French art of the Middle Ages. The cathedral had crutches, as Michelet said in his reproach. Its flying buttresses are so pure because they bear faithfully the weight of a world, as a century gathers the effort of a thousand years into a single effort. And so the cathedral has that aspect of improvisation which renders it so alive and which also gives it its appearance of fragility. When we think of the haste with which the work was done, we are tempted to think that the French people, suddenly aroused from sleep to enter upon the intoxication of life, dazzled with the daylight, overrun by innumerable images, and overflowing with energy and joy, had a premonition that, between the theocratic oppression which had reached its death struggle and the military oppression which was coming, it would barely have time to express, in tempestuous confusion, that which it had understood of Nature upon its first meeting with her since the death of the ancient gods.

When the cathedral was vanquished, at the same time with the Commune and for the same reasons, there

remained nothing—save itself—of the impulse from which it had come forth. The energy of the nation, at first enervated by its own growth, and then crushed under the renewed invasions and under what was perhaps the most atrocious misery that history has known —the energy of the nation gave way Nothing was



Bourges (xiii to xvi Century). The five portals of the cathedral.

left in France but the growing monarchy and Catholicism, which, by working upon the disheartened spirits of the people, was regaining the ground it had lost. The upper clergy, the representative of political Christianity, took possession of the cathedral in order to oppose the doctrinal Christianity of the regular clergy against the human Christianity of the people. It is, thanks to the people, that Catholicism profited by the blows which the Middle Ages had dealt it and

gained the fame for æsthetic greatness which has rendered it so alluring. It became for the future the sweet and terrible thing that we know, so powerful in its art, so powerful in its morality. It was diverse corresponding to the way in which it manifested itself in France, in Italy, in Flanders, in Spain, in Germany, or in England, and yet it was one in its dogma and in its authority. It was at once theological and popular, traditional and spontaneous, universal and national. Students have believed—the Catholic Church itself sincerely believed—that it had made the Occident of the thirteenth century in its own image. In reality, it was France and Europe, in the exaltation of their life, which, for one hundred and fifty years, caused Catholicism to assume their own appearance.

When St. Bernard, already anathematizing the stiff Romanesque sculpture which decorated the earlier temples, was at the same time combating the communal spirit and, in Abelard, condemning the spirit of the universities, he said, "so numerous and so astounding did the variety of the forms appear everywhere, that the monk is more tempted to study the marbles than his books and to meditate on these figures far more than on the law of God." The cathedral is Christian only for those who do not feel that all things human contain Christianity, and precede and survive it, as it is anti-Christian only for those who do not sense the way in which Christianity remains human.[1] The cathedral is human and traditional and revolutionary, and profoundly opposed to the principle of authority in

[1] Stated in the modern form, the problem is without meaning. People are still discussing as to whether the builders of the cathedral were not "anticlerical." When will they begin to understand that every rise of life in the breast of the masses shatters the dogma of yesterday, even when it celebrates it? Whether they are freemasons or not is of no importance. The image makers of the Middle Ages are not freethinkers. They are free instincts.

moral matters set forth by Christianity when it claimed to be definitively organized; we see this opposition in the way that Gothic art expressed moral ideas in the form most accessible to our senses and translated

Poitiers (Palais de Justice) (end of the xiv Century). Jeanne de Boulogne, detail.

into the language which is most purely that of the senses, the dogmas which affirm the majesty of pure spirit. It rehabilitates the nature of man, it rehabilitates nature itself in the world where he lives. It loves man for himself, weak and filled with an un-

bounded courage, and it describes his paradise with the trees, the waters, and the clouds which he sees when he raises his eyes or when he goes forth from the gates of his city; it tells of the vegetables full of earth and the fruits that are brought to him from the fields on market days by the domestic animals who share his lot.

The cathedral, indeed the whole art of the ogive, realizes for a moment the equilibrium between the virgin forces of the people and the metaphysical monument whose mold Christian philosophy had been preparing for a thousand years. But these forces break the mold when they have attained their full expansion. The masons and the image makers, in opposition to the Church, consecrate the entrance of the ever-dying and ever-renascent form of the world into our spirit and our flesh. The desire of the people sweeps on into its movement all the inert matter of the prohibitions and the formulas in which the mechanism of theocracy claims the right to imprison it. Undoubtedly, the clergy imposed on the decorators an obligation, which they, however, very cheerfully accepted—that of respecting in the images a rigorous hierarchy, an inflexible and symbolic method of writing, over the arrangement of which the Church kept surveillance; "the art alone belongs to the painter, the law to the Fathers," said the council of Nicea.[1] The council of Nicea was not aware that the art is everything and that the law without it is only an empty garment, for at the moment when art springs from the hearts of men it is passion, will, suffering, religion, justice, life. What did it matter, therefore, that the edifice was the cross, that the apse was the crown of thorns, that the choir was the head of Christ, that the fire of the stained

[1] For everything that concerns the external relationships in the art of the cathedrals, consult *L'Art Religieux du 13e Siècle en France*, by Émile Mâle.

Avignon (xiv Century). The palace of the Popes.

glass was celestial light, and that the towers were arms in prayer? The crowd in the Middle Ages expressed itself symbolically because the symbol summarized the higher moral realities which it did not discuss, so that it might remain the freer to discover its spiritual realities and because it found within itself an inexhaustible pretext for giving voice to the thing that was stifling it. In the Middle Ages, symbolism and theology were bound up with life, and their life was the real one; they were only one element in the formidable symphony in which all the forces of that period met, responded to each other and were associated one with another. Society, unconcerned as to the elements which constituted it, allowed its equilibrium and its activity to be organized spontaneously by the fiery life of these elements.

When we stand at a distance or on a height, it seems as if we could not apprehend the history of a great race save in the general characteristics which mark that race for us. It then seems to us to be contained entirely in one particular work and to take on a form that is, so to speak, visible or tangible, wherein all the adventures of its intelligence and its sorrow appear, as if sublimated. It seems to have lived, bled, carried on war and commerce, cultivated the soil, and wrought in iron, only that this work may be born, that it may contain, summarize, and exalt the obscure lives and the unformulated feeling of the billions of its living and its dead. And thereafter, each time that we evoke the spirit of a people, the name of a man who most obviously represents it in its most decisive hour comes to our lips. Beethoven brings us Germany, Shakespeare England, Michael Angelo Italy, Cervantes Spain, Rubens Flanders, Rembrandt the Netherlands. When we think of France, we hesitate. Montaigne is the hero of the eternal intelligence, standing above the

destiny of the peoples, above their language, above their passion. Pascal has not the divine joy that mounts with the blood of the people in its acts, even when these are the acts of injustice and despair. In those who have best told our story, Rabelais, La Fontaine, and Molière, there is lacking that kind of

Lisieux. House of the xv Century.

mystic passion which renders the human soul heroic and which makes it possible that, through a single man and at a single moment, there may be concentrated and epitomized within the human soul all the powers of life, which, at that particular moment, define for our eyes the course of destiny and of the world. Hugo puffs up his power with programs and sermons. Well then! the cathedral has everything we love in Hugo or Pascal; everything of ourselves that we find in Rabelais, Molière, or La Fontaine; everything that, in Montaigne, rises above time and place.

But by its vaults and by its towers it elevates all this in so lyrical a passion, that it lifts the French crowd up to the supreme conceptions which the greatest of our artists have almost never attained.

The French hero is the cathedral.

Lubeck

Chapter VIII. THE EXPANSION OF THE FRENCH IDEA

I

THE "French miracle" was such a miracle indeed, that it stupefied the people of the cities and compelled the poor of the countryside to come as often as they were able to see, rising higher every year above the slopes of the tiled roofs and the sharp gables, the blue and gold embroidery of the painted stones, the blood of the stained glass glowing in the light, and the massive or tapering sweep of the towers and the spires that vibrated with the throb of the bronze. Their work done, the masons and image makers looked upon it with as much astonishment as if they had come from the other end of the world to

view it. Each one had labored in his workshop, had made fast a window, had cut a statue, or erected his wall—stone on stone; each one had seen only a leaf or a blade of grass in the forest; many had died, even, without raising their eyes from the bud that had grown under their hands, from the fruit whose ripening they had guarded and not always had the time to gather. And now that the scaffolding was removed, and the trestles were torn down, here were tall, solemn vaults, rays of light in cataracts, a slender mountain of columns and statues filling the familiar heavens. Whence came this formidable unity in which the presence of faith, of hope, of the living god who dwelt in the heart of the crowds affirmed itself without anyone, not even the master builder who had made the plan for the edifice, dreaming of expressing it? Not one of them knew that it pre-existed in him, not one of them knew that his own humility and his neighbor's and his own weakness and his neighbor's—proceeding in the same direction, at the same pace, and with the same rhythm —were fusing more and more each day to bring forth the huge, anonymous power which should burst upon history as the highest manifestation of collective idealism. When they turned to view their work not one of them remembered that he had set his hand to it, but they knew that that way was paradise.

And so people came from the country, and even from a greater distance. They came to see, they came to take lessons, they came to ask the master builders to cross the sea or the mountains at the expense of the rich cities, all of which wanted to have the most beautiful church or the highest rampart. For two centuries, moreover, France had been the great hearth of the Occident. Through the Normans, it had conquered Sicily and England; under the ingenuous and powerfully stimulating pretext of delivering the Holy

Sepulcher, it was incessantly sending forth colonizing expeditions to the Orient, covering Syria, Greece, and the islands with French settlements, and attempting to occupy Egypt and northern Africa. French barons were wearing the crowns of Athens, of Constantinople,

England (xii Century). Lincoln Cathedral.

of Cyprus, and of Jerusalem. There emanated from the French soul that energy for expansion which permitted it each year, at a hundred points in France, to dig canals, to build bridges, aqueducts, and fountains, to open hospitals and schools, and to hang the pointed vaults, in majestic flight, a hundred feet from the soil. As it was to teach the world, five hundred years later, that the revelation of monarchy was outlived, so it ingenuously and joyously denounced theological revelation by sowing action, life, experience, and liberty everywhere.

Where the military men were unable to gain an entrance, thought still would penetrate by means of the merchants and the artists. On all the rivers of Europe, boats were carrying the material and the thought of the West. French romances sped all over the world. Almost all the heads of the foreign universities had passed through the University of Paris, where the nations maintained permanent colleges. Philippe Chinard, the French master builder, followed Frederick II everywhere. Charles of Anjou had called another, Pierre d'Angicourt, to Sicily. St. Louis, prisoner of the Saracens and spiritual king of the earth, was accompanied to Palestine by Eudes de Montereau, who fortified Jaffa. After the great Guillaume de Sens had broken his legs by a fall from the scaffolding in the nave of Canterbury, a hundred others had answered the call from foreign communes or vestry boards. Martin Ragevy and Villard de Honnecourt built churches in distant parts of Hungary. Companies of masons left for Germany. A master builder of Troyes built the temples, convents, castles, and commanderies of Cyprus. Mathieu d'Arras, who made the plans for the cathedral and the bridge of Prague, came from Avignon. The greater part of the Spanish cities, in the fourteenth century, called in French architects. Others went as far as Poland, and even Finland. The Benedictines, the Dominicans, and the Cistercians, above all, founded houses and orders that spread the vital thought over Europe. The Order of the Templars, the Order of Calatrava, and the Teutonic Order spread with a continuous activity in which, from one end of Christendom to the other, men recognized for an hour their sole and puissant hope. The great moral unity of Catholicism everywhere took on the appearance which the social idealism of the French communes irresistibly imposed on it.

Almost everywhere, at least in the beginning, the master builders would bring a first plan inspired by Amiens, or Rheims, or Chartres, or Notre Dame, or Beauvais. But the building of a cathedral often went

England (xi and xii Centuries). Ely Cathedral.

on for two or three centuries, native architects succeeded the French masters, the masons, and image makers, who were recruited in increasing numbers from the local corporations, took root in their soil. The sky

and its sun and its clouds, the surrounding plain, the bare or woody mountain that rose at the gates of the city and the age-old forces established in the race by the regime of the seasons, by the nature of the work done in the country, its trade, peace, war, and food—all took form, little by little, in the profile of the naves and of the towers, in the disposition of the bays, in the transparence of the stained glass, and in the projections which distributed light and shadow on the front of the monuments. But the fact that the style was originally a borrowed one was always a drawback to the work; never, or hardly ever, did any town or country again have the impulse from which, for an hour, there issued forth the spontaneous agreement of the French crowd with the enthusiastic creation and the logic of the artisans who expressed it.

II

England, however, barely missed participating in the miracle at the same time with northern France, when the latter country lived through that moment which, until then, has never occurred more than once in the history of a people and which France, the India of the Middle Ages, and the Ancient Empire of Egypt alone have known. England discovered the ogive at the same time that we did, if not some years earlier. Why, therefore, could she not, by making use of those powerful faculties for generalization of which, from Roger Bacon to Newton, she has given as great a proof as we have from Abelard to Lamarck—why could she not systematize the use of the ogive, hang the stones of her soil in the air between two diagonal lines of ribbing, articulate the gigantic limbs of the great body, and cause the flying buttresses to rise from

England (xiii Century). Litchfield Cathedral.

the pavement of the cities as if to support the weight of the towers?[1]

It was because the English cathedral was principally the luxury of a certain class of society, because it did not translate one of those surges of idealism in which the French crowd sometimes offers a meeting place—for ten years, for a month, for an hour—to the poor and the rich, to those who do nothing, and to those who work, to those who suffer, and to those who are happy. As in France, to be sure, the English middle class had, in the eleventh century, secured the rights that were confirmed by Magna Charta in 1215. But in order to maintain these rights it was not obliged to struggle constantly as did our communes, which were menaced incessantly by the Church and the barons. In the freedom of the English commune, the solidarity of the social organs was not so necessary, and the fierce pride of the corporations, which the political powers always treated on the footing of equality, set them up one against the other without danger to themselves. The cathedral was an expression of the wealth they had in common and not of their brotherhood.

It is egoistic, exclusive, and close to the great current of humanity: its formula is stiff and dry, seldom animated—and then always timidly—by the confused and swarming life of the bas-reliefs and the statues through which the French artisans brought to the framework of society, like fruits on an altar, the tribute of their love. For five hundred years the aristocratic arts of priests and soldiers had been carried on in the shelter of the ramparts of the military strongholds and the walls of the monasteries of these mystic islands, and

[1] And why did she send over to France for Guillaume de Sens if this builder, and perhaps the architect of Saint-Denis, were not the first in Europe to use the broken arch as the determining principle of the whole architecture of the ogive?

from such arts nothing of the people, or of life itself, could come forth. Ireland, with its dripping humidity buried under its green leaves, could not pass on to England, when transmitting Christianity to that country, anything more than the miniatures patiently composed in its monasteries while the eternal rain

England (xiii Century). Exeter Cathedral, the nave.

drenched the windowpanes. The weapons of the Saxons, the carved prows of the Scandinavian barks, and the importations from Byzantium were only so many separate elements for which the flame of a homogeneous people, that could weld them into a unified force, was lacking. When the Normans arrived they appropriated the Roman tradition imported from France in the course of previous centuries, and built many powerful churches in which a square and crenelated tower rose from the center of the nave, as if to impress upon the mind the idea of military domination. But they were camping on British soil. They were to

furnish to the English people only the unshakable foundation of temples and strongholds. Cathedrals, abbeys, castles, ramparts, illuminated manuscripts, funerary statues of alabaster—all was an art of the classes, from the beginning until the hour when Shakespeare frees and spreads over the world the torrent of emotions and images sealed up in the heart of the crowd by all those somber stones and those carved sepulchers.

As one descends the valley of the Seine, the spires that appear above the towers become sharper and frailer. In Normandy, the life that creeps about the side of the French cathedrals and thoroughly imbues them with movement, becomes fixed and already tends to lose movement, even while it becomes slighter and more abundant, while the mass becomes airy and is cut into more and more by openings. The mighty poem of the people becomes complicated, mannered, and inclines toward the attributes of the art object. We are midway between the social art of France and the stiff rich monument, that we see when the mist rises, lifting above the lawns and the trees the symmetrically pointed spires and the parapets of the central tower that weighs heavily upon the long, low nave. Already at Rouen and at Coutances the tower is placed over the cross of the transept. And if the living decoration of the French provinces still animates the Norman churches, their sharply cut and voluntary movement gives us a foretaste of the geometrical decoration of England.

The diadem raised by the merchants of the British Isles above their rude industrial cities seemed to be made by the hands of goldsmiths and, in contrast with the enthusiasm expressed in the monuments which on the other side of the Channel derive their life from the houses and the fields in order to exalt it, the English cathedral is very obviously conceived as a proud hom-

age to the emancipation of a hard and egoistic class. Whereas wings spread out above the naves of the Continental churches in which the vibrant columns rose from the soil, here a wooden roof supported by corbels dominated the low naves, which were arrested on all sides by implacable horizontals. Often, tight sheaves of parallel ribbing choked all the lines of the nave whose

ENGLAND (XIII Century). Carnarvon Castle.

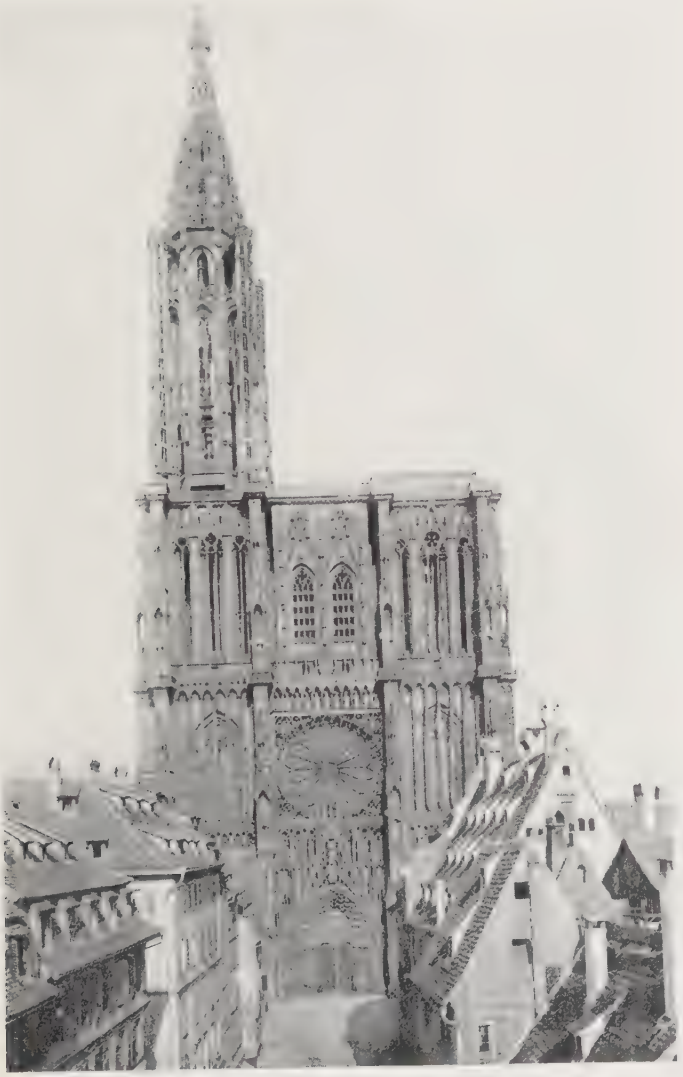
profiles and curves disappeared among the tense clusters which they formed—a forest composed of a thousand dead branches without the leafage of the vault and without space and without air above them. In the apse, where the French builder allowed the darkness to deepen, where the wall was rounded like a cradle about the living god that it inclosed so lovingly, the wall fell away like a portcullis, permitting the light to pass through the straight-lined colonnades as if they were iron railings.

The supreme expression of the English ogival style,

the perpendicular, appeared at the time when, among us, the flame of stone, crackling as it launched skyward, was announcing the last flicker of the exhausted life around which a fatal twilight was rapidly gathering. On the one hand we have the end of a dream, on the other an affirmation of the will; on one side the abrupt

GERMANY (XI Century). Cathedral of Speyer.

dissociation of the social forces, the defeat that comes day by day, even as man's illusions recommence each day, the mad charges, the feverish plunging of a civilization at the point of death—and on the other side the concentration of all the means of conquest: method in warfare, a definite goal to attain, victory, the practiced and steady rigor of a civilization that is determining and establishing itself. Whereas on the one side there is no longer anything more than ruins or abandoned works, we find pinnacles arising on the other side and spires shooting upward, the wrinkled façades that appear to be made of frost and glass,



Alsace (xii and xiii Centuries). Strassburg Cathedral.

and the close-set latticed tracery of stone stalactites. For the spectral, aërial, and vague poetry of the English people to have its full effect in these icy and magnificent monuments, one should see them under a blue veil of moonlight or see the sharp spires rising out of the wet leaves and the mist. The art of the north demands the complicity of the vapor that spreads through space, of the foliage, of the sleeping water, and the uncertain illumination of the night. The rectangular manor houses lift up above the lakes the formidable profile of their polygonal towers, and as we view them we feel their whole bulk, and yet something more than their bulk, weighing upon the sinister history of the Middle Ages in England. They would not become a part of the mighty dream of this people—whose will has all the power that dwells in the lines of its towers, a people as resistant as their walls, this people whose soul, when it peers to its depths, is as steeped in fog and moonlight as they are themselves—they would not become a part of the dream of England, I repeat, if a mantle of ivy did not cover them from top to bottom, if blood did not filter between their stones, and if the echo of falling axes were not heard when one traverses their black corridors, where wandering specters brush by one in passing. The soul of the north has not been able to define itself by the visible lines of the world; and only poetry and music are vague enough to receive it in their embrace.

III

The sea with its ebb and flow carries the thought from one shore to the other. England, which owed so much to the Scandinavians, in its turn carried Anglo-Norman art to Norway, whereas Sweden, whither Etienne Bonneuil had come with his companions from

Alsace (xiii Century). Strassburg Cathedral, a face.

France at the end of the thirteenth century, to build the cathedral of Upsala, received a mingling of German and French architecture by way of the Baltic. Indirectly, it is still French art that fertilizes the eastern slope of the northern peninsula, for German art came in a straight line from the masons of Champagne, of Ile-de-France, and of Picardy.

That is not to say that Germany had not attempted repeatedly, from the darkest moments of the Middle Ages onward, to create a national art for herself from the elements which she received from without, or that she evolved from within. Charlemagne had created a mixed civilization—Ancient, Byzantine, Germanic, and Christian—whose plastic expression has practically disappeared. It was the work of monks and scribes, a crude and false thing that had to die. When the Romanesque appeared it found, on the contrary, a social and political soil perfectly adapted to give to it a very powerful, clear-cut, and pure character. The Holy Roman Empire, the clergy, and the feudal lords meet there for an hour and bind those enormous stones with a moral cement so hard that it did not seem possible that mystic and warlike Germany would ever cease building the red walls that are stained by the rain and seldom animated by statues. As a matter of fact, it was late when she ceased, and she did so with bad grace. And when Bohemia desired a national architecture and sought solid materials for it near-by, it was in the nervous and sober combination of the massive German Romanesque and of the French ogival style that she found the formula for her art. The temples on the banks of the Rhine combined round and octagonal forms in the apses, in the transepts, in the four towers at the corners, and in the short curved steeples. Doubtless, they never expressed the living emotion of a people any more than did the other archi-

tectural forms of Germany; they expressed the power of the affiliated military and religious castes, who nevertheless recognized the spontaneous expression of the popular classes, faithfully and strictly disciplined. The real soul of the German crowds was never in the stone. The men of this period, who revealed the German soul to the future, were the wandering minstrels who sang the tale of the Nibelungen as, later on, it was to be heard in the voice of the master singers of the industrial cities and the hero musicians of the hours of hope or of despair —Luther, Sebastian Bach, Beethoven, and Richard Wagner. The German cathedral is forever being built up and pulled down. A few men come together; suddenly cries ring out from all their breasts and float above them; anon the sounds have found their echoing form in aërial vaults for which all the hearts are pillars. And when the men are no longer assembled, the cathedral has disappeared.

GERMANY (XIII Century). Cathedral of Naumburg, Countess Baba.

Despite the Hansa, despite the league of the Rhine towns, despite the wealth of the free cities of Germany whose rise was assisted by the struggle, in the thirteenth century, between the Pope and the Emperor, despite the strength of the Teutonic Order which covered Bavaria and the Sieben Gebirge with square towers flanked with sharp-pointed watchtowers, Germany of the Middle Ages had no original architecture.[1] The German cathedral does not resemble the living monuments of the French provinces or the marvelous goldsmith architecture of England or the mighty markets of Flanders or those accumulations of stone over shadowy depths in which we get a gleam of gold, as in the Spanish churches. It remains quite itself by the pedantic complications of its lines, the tangle of its ribbing, its stiffness, and its bristling, narrow, and metallic movement. But it is especially when it frees itself from the formula which it extracted little by little from the ogival edifices of Picardy and Burgundy that it almost invariably sacrifices its law of internal structure to the abstract and confused sentimentalism of the ornamented surfaces.

It was the wise and foolish virgins of the French portals who came to Strassburg to bring the good news to Germany. The definite balance of ensemble and the grace of the smiling statues in which, however, there is already the mark of the good-natured sentimentalism of the Teutons would not have surprised a master builder of the valley of the Seine. But the hard red façade, with its resemblance to rusty iron, already showed the tendencies of the German style through the abundance and the stiffness of the vertical lines, the long, pious parallels, the dry spindling forms of the

[1] The cathedral of Cologne, which was for so long a time considered the type and the masterpiece of Gothic architecture, is a turgid, thin, and dry amplification of the cathedral of Amiens.

colonnettes, and despite the magic life of the whole work which reminds one of a windowpane in winter when it is enriched by the fern shapes of the frost. Such a building was the necessary step between the mighty animation of Amiens, of Rheims, of Notre Dame de Paris, and the dogmatism of Cologne in which the

GERMANY (XIV Century). Gate at Neubrandenburg.

letter of the theological law had reigned two centuries earlier and which for a hundred years presided over the severe development of Romanesque architecture.

When the German cities had associated themselves to regulate the movement of all the treasures of Europe, the cloths of Flanders, the wines of France, the spices of the Orient brought by ships to the mouth of the Rhine and transported along its tributaries to the center and heart of the Teutonic continent, when by reason of the foreign war between the Papacy and the

Empire, the currents of activity that circulated everywhere had brought to all the cities workmen from the Rhenish provinces, French image makers, wood carvers from the Black Forest, and bronze workers that the

GERMANY (XIV Century). Rathaus of Stralsund.

honest and powerful Roman school of Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim had been educating for two centuries, a fertile mingling of all these confused forces developed in the German soil the revelation of its desires. To be exact, the process went on for a century,

the thirteenth, during which the statue makers of Naumburg, before they reverted to the complication and the honest sentimentalism of German sculpture,

GERMANY (XIV Century). Cathedral of Ulm.

made a vigorous effort in the direction of the monumental style whose qualities of love, strength, and simplicity the masters of Rheims were at that moment revealing to France and to the world. But this cen-

tury sufficed to define the dominating tendencies of Gothic-building in Germany before the mind of the workman in the industrial cities had seized upon it and developed in it, with meticulous ingenuity and patience, the complications which, while it all contributed to lead architecture away from its true function, prepared Germany for the Renaissance by individualizing little by little its industries and crafts.

Beside the cathedrals of our northern provinces, square to the very base of their towers, established so powerfully on their horizontal lines and deriving all the elements of their incomparable lyrism from the life about them and from the need to fulfill a definite purpose, the German cathedral is subjective and confessedly sentimental; clearly, it aims to rise as high as possible at all costs and to attain its objects by abstract means. Everywhere we find hard lines mounting straight upward and giving all the more sweep to the edifice because its pyramidal form is indicated in them from the ground to the top of the spire that is planted full in the center of the façade, on a single tower which gathers together the elements of the ensemble in order to carry it still higher by prolonging the lines of the pointed steeples which shoot up from all sides. It was of German Gothic that those writers were thinking when they defined the Catholic architecture of the Middle Ages as an impetuous aspiration toward heaven. It is above all a moral aspiration, and it never attained so perfect an expression in balance of structure as to make it comparable with that which gives to the towers of Rheims their aërial lightness, to the old spire of Chartres its pure and infinite movement, and to the towers of Notre Dame or Amiens the tremendous power to lift the pavement of the cities to the very bosom of space where, every day of spring and summer and autumn, it is caressed by the gold of the last mo-

ments of the sunlight. It is a noble effort, none the less, a mighty and mystic elevation of human sentiment toward the poignant love for that unknown thing which the sense of life is, and which the great music

FLANDERS (XIII and XIV Centuries). The market of Ypres.

will stir up, in the depths of our hearts, five centuries later.

In the north of Germany, over which war passes less frequently, where the bare plains that descend to the seashore contrast with the overhanging rocks, the trailing mists of the Rhine, and the forests of black pines of the mountainous regions of Bavaria and Austria, where the most powerful Hanseatic cities of the Empire, Lubeck, Bremen, and Hamburg claimed the commerce of all northern Europe, from the counters of London and Bruges to the fairs of Nijni-Novgorod, the pyramidal thrust of the churches was far less wild.

Representing wholesale commerce and maritime life, the solid Rathauses were set up with walls as high as cliffs, lightened by circular openings between pointed turrets, to withstand the salt spray which forms a green coating on the copper steeples that rise above the red roofs. The blue-and-black coating of the bricks gave them an oily varnish, and the fishermen with their boots of seal hide, returning from the ice flows, found again their slaty sky, their greasy waters, and the dull luster of the tar on their boats. Here the soil and the water took architecture back to themselves, and the ogive restored its original significance by adapting it to its function.

More profoundly rooted than the great Catholic idea, as a result of which Europe was to be covered with temples that should be of the same type everywhere, the local use of the edifice, at least in the countries of very marked character, weighed down the idea until it touched the earth at every point. The Dutch, a practical, moderately idealistic, and spontaneously balanced people, preserved the essential principles of their first monuments until the period when, in Germany and in France, the growing complication of ogival architecture marked the end of mediæval society. The independence of Holland and the Reformation are announced by the bare naves, the massiveness and the roundness of the pillars which support them, and the sturdy gathered strength that is a quality of their mind, the mind of serious business men, of engineers, and of the solid soldiers that the Dutch make upon occasion. We see their quality everywhere—in the thick, low dikes that hurl back the sea, in the slow, full-bellied boats that come up to the heart of the pasture lands, as well as in the buildings of to-day which continue to embody the unshakable good sense of the Dutch amid the architectural anarchy of Europe.

Flanders is nearer the soil on which the cathedrals rose. There, from the end of the twelfth century onward, the cities of workmen where the trade in hides and woolens

Flanders (xiii to xv Century). Market and belfry of Bruges.

centered, where cloths were woven and dyed—Bruges and Ypres especially—built formidable markets whose vertical walls, pierced by two regular rows of windows, have the sureness that comes of necessity. They unhesitatingly express a categorical ideal, thanks to "a

century of friendship."[1] Here the admirable heroism of popular need triumphs over all narrow interests and belies the systems that endeavor to bring it back to an abstract, universal, and dogmatic form. Ogival art was so little the language of Christianity when the latter is stripped of everything which binds it to a given locality and to matter, that if its social expression in France assumed an externally religious form, the principle which it carried with it engendered commercial buildings in Flanders, as, in the Italian city, it brought forth sober fortresses and proud municipal palaces. The Flemings built these also, to be sure, but it was to defend their warehouses and their looms. Their finest monuments were born of their mercantile spirit, as the finest Italian monuments were born of the passionate individualism which characterizes Italy, and as the finest French monuments sprang from the social idealism which has been the life of France and which passes, through Rabelais and Diderot, from the Gothic cathedral to the Revolution.

IV

Perhaps in all Europe during the Middle Ages of Christianity, mystic Spain was the only country that was unable to attain the summarized architectural expression of the desire of its multitudes. Two centuries of incessant warfare between the natives and the Moors, a violent confusion of races and languages, a soil cut up by ravines, by mountains, and by inaccessible plateaus which stony deserts isolated one from another, were enough to prevent a collective soul from defining itself there. Spain underwent the influence of Roman architecture, Arab architecture, Romanesque

[1] Michelet, *Histoire de France.*

Spain (xiii Century). Cathedral of Avila.

architecture, and French architecture, one after the other, until the hour of political unity revealed her to herself, but too late for her to escape the influences of nascent European individualism, which at least encouraged her to release the brutal and subtle energy that she possessed even though she did not recognize

Spain (xv Century). Façade of the palace of Guadalajara.

it. For four hundred years the little Christian monarchies of her northern provinces had to send for the architects and sculptors of France, of Burgundy, of Germany, and the Netherlands to build and decorate the alcazars and the churches. The sculptors of the school of Toulouse invaded Castile, Galicia, Navarra, and Catalonia whither, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the image makers and the architects of the valley of the Seine repaired in their turn. In the sixteenth century, in the full tide of the Renaissance, when Italy was already pressing upon her through her

Spain (xiii to xv Century). Cathedral of Burgos.

Mediterranean provinces, Spain was still calling in French and Burgundian masters.

From the time when the Cistercians and the Clunisians introduced Romanesque sculpture into Spain, the art, upon contact with this people that loves picturesque projections and brutal contrasts of light and shade, assumed a character of exuberance and of decorative profusion in which architectural line was lost. It was in vain that the hell which caused the capitals and tympanums to bristle with monstrous beasts retreated before the invasion of the saints and the Virgin which the French image makers brought with them when the building guilds in France were too rich in workmen to employ them for the construction and decoration of the churches. The native pupils of the visiting artisans were men of a different type: half-warriors, half-peasants, whom the fire of the sky had rendered as hard as their flints, and who chopped away the trees so as to have no shade in which to cool their blood; such men could not accommodate the mystic fever that consumed them to the profiles of the churches whose sculptured stone lent animation to the work without in any way impairing its power, even as an undulation passes over the mass of leaves at the edge of a forest. At the same time the memory of the Moorish leather workers, armorers, and goldsmiths pursued them at their labors. They chiseled stone as though it were a metal that one can cast, twist, and emboss from within. When Gil de Siloe, the fifteenth-century master, received the manifold heritage from the French statue makers, from the Spaniards whom they had educated, and from the Berber decorators who sawed the lacework of the paneling and the railings of the mosques out of wood —the tombs and the altar screens, enormous jewels of the lapidary which came from his hands, seemed to be incrusted with gems and to bristle with stal-

actites; they were fluted and warty like an embossed copper.

When Spain had only Granada to recapture from the Moors, when the dust and the rocks of the peninsula had been reunited under the Catholic scepter, there was really an hour when, if moral fellowship was not

Spain. Mausoleum at Miraflores, by Gil de Siloe

attained in order to reach great architecture at a single bound, there was, at least, a fever that infected the whole land in common; something funereal, cruel, and frenzied fired all the somber hearts and spurted forth from them like jets of blood thickened with black clots, like furious torrents of gold and stones. What need there was for order and harmony! The naves built by the French and the mosques built by the Mussulmans were torn open so that in the middle of them, between gratings of gold, a choir filled with golden

ornaments might be installed, a mountain of gold that gleams in the shadows. Without the lamps it would have been impossible to see the clothed idols, the crucified corpses with the bleeding knees, or the crust of gold which covered the tangled ribbing of the vaults, or the night that swallows up everything. The golden orgy of the Flemish altar screens encumbers the whole nave, enormous golden staircases descend into the churches which are crushed by heavy lacework of stone. Here is a forest of heavily built belfries, here are thick traceries of closely worked embroidery in which the flame of the Gothic twists like an arabesque and under which the Arab arch breaks the ogival arch and causes it to become round and undulating. Here is an ocean of enervated sculptures wherein the most mystic of peoples offers the fearful testimony of its submission to the purposes of the most mystic of centuries. We are made to think of the crackling of the fires that burn victims at the stake, of their charred bodies, and of the frightful immolation of the human being to the savage powers that he can neither control nor understand and obey.

Between the sublime instinct of the crowds who accepted all the symbols so as to permit their creative force to reach its goal without weakening, and the newborn reason of the individuals who discussed all the symbols in order that they might try to penetrate the mystery of nature, there was a separation that tore men's flesh, and it was here that the expression of this tragic period reached its apogee of confusion and disorder. Spain must have felt that she was born to the collective life too late and that she was no longer in time to be the first to expound the shaken idea of Catholicism; and it was perhaps because of remorse over the fact that she had not lived it through until after the others had done so, that she remained attached

SPAIN (end of the XV Century). Detail of the façade of San Gregorio at Valladolid.

to it the most fiercely of all, and that she was the last. In her fever, she heaped up all the stones wrought by the sculptors who, for five hundred years, had been living on her lean flanks, the Visigoths, the French, the Flemings, the Germans, the Moors, the Jews, and the Iberians, and it was with furor that she affirmed her

PORTUGAL (XIV and XV Centuries). Façade of the chapel of Batalha.

irreducible fanaticism at the hour when the workmen of the north, in the countries torn by war, were confessing their despair.

However, nothing was lost. Man, goaded by doubt, was commencing once more his climb toward the inaccessible summit. While the last masons were setting the last and the highest spires over the last and the highest naves, there sallied forth from a port of that same Spain three caravels that were to plunge into the west. In barely a hundred and fifty years, at a time

when there were no other roads than the rivers, when the cities were surrounded by walls, when several months of dangerous navigation were needed to go

PORTUGAL (XVI Century). Window of the abbey of Thomar.

from the coasts of France to the coasts of the Levant, the thing which had enabled the men of the Middle Ages to establish over the whole of Europe one of the densest and yet one of the most coherent and deeply

rooted civilizations in history—their obscure solidarity —was now suddenly expanding as if the life of a too-powerful body had burst its armor, as if its blood, its glance, and its thought were spreading on all sides through the rifts in the metal. The Portuguese architects were already asking the great mariners, who were colonizing Africa and India, to tell them how the Indians decorated their temples, and to bring back to them from their voyages the things that they would group in the last flowerings of Moorish art and of ogival art: keels, anchors, cables, the fauna and flora of the seas, octopuses, madripores, corals, and shells. . . . The conquest of the sea and the sky was to cause the spirit to leap when once it was stripped of its ancient beliefs, and bring it to the threshold of new intuitions where new beliefs elaborate themselves little by little.

YPRES

Assisi

Chapter IX. THE MISSION OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI

I

ITALY did not know the centuries of silence into which the annihilation of the Latin world plunged Gaul. Visited, as Gaul was, and more frequently than Gaul, by invasion, Italy retained, nevertheless, the memory of a well-ordered world of imposing aspect, one which resembled her own desire. The world of the ancient Mediterranean was to enter the modern world along the slope of her natural genius. Rome installed in the basilicas its rebaptized gods. The old races called upon the old civilizations to furnish them the means of awaiting the return of life.

The Barbarians overthrew the temples, their Italianized sons set them up again. And nothing is changed. From the ruin of yesterday still another basilica comes forth. The role of the conqueror is not to teach new

processes, but to infuse new energy. He offers his virgin senses to the revelation of the glorious landscape. Thus was Greece rendered fecund by the Dorians. New generalizations are born from the melting of the

Lucca (xi Century). The cathedral.

human material from the north in the Greco-Latin crucible.

We know it well. We must tell it. The greatest men have confessed it to us. Montaigne will ask Italy to approve his wisdom, Shakespeare invokes her name daily to justify his passion. Goethe lives through her,

and Stendhal, and Nietzsche. Byron dies through her. In the days of Rembrandt's affluence, Giorgione reigns over his studio, and when he becomes poor there is always something of the Italian flame at the center of the ray of light which follows his descent into the shadows of the mind. It is Italy that organizes the

Siena (xii and xiii Centuries). Fonte Branda.

tumult of Rubens, that reveals space to Velasquez, to Poussin the architecture of the earth, to Claude Lorrain the architecture of the sky. As soon as one touches Italy, one feels oneself overwhelmed by the intoxication that comes of understanding. Intelligence and instinct merge, the scientist agrees that the artist shall take possession of mechanics and of geometry, the artist willingly grinds the colors and mixes the mortar. The most atrocious voluptuousness is only a step from sainthood; chastity burns like an orgy. Here love is as funereal as death; death has the attraction and the

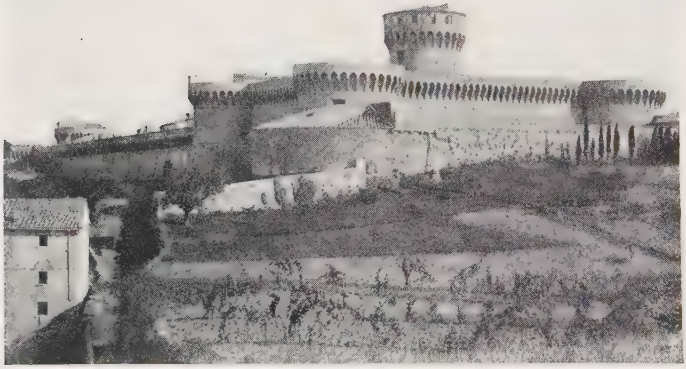
mystery of love. The ambition to dominate increases the thirst for conquest and knowledge, and yet knowledge and conquest are never definitive enough to make him who desires them worthy to command. Here pride is so strong that it will invariably abase itself before the things it still must learn in order that, with them, it may affirm itself before the world. Nowhere do crime and genius approach so closely to each other. Cain and Prometheus may be divined in the curve of every brow, in the depths of all eyes, and in all the hands that clutch the handle of the dagger or the tool of the workman. The earth trembles, and yet one feels something eternal in the profile of these mountains and the curve of these shores. Everywhere in Italy the world incorporates the mind with its form, and demands insatiably that the passion of men's hearts shall tear it forth. Italy! There is something that pains in the love that we have for you; we are afraid that we shall never know fully what you desire to teach us.

The potential force which is there must impose itself despite everything. Byzantium itself contributes less than is generally believed. Save at Ravenna, a colony of the Greek empire, save at Venice, where the Orient lives, save in Sicily, a Greek country where the Byzantine elements mingle with the Arab and Norman elements developing, in the Middle Ages, a voluptuous, cruel, paradoxical, and barbarous style that is impossible to define and difficult to recognize, Byzantium does not furnish Italy with a single idea which, on being transplanted, can originate a new architectural order. Italy accepts the cupola only because it already covers the Pantheon. In the middle of the thirteenth century, when the French image makers, the masters of Occidental sculpture, are in demand everywhere, Nicola Pisano studies Roman sarcophagi to learn the working of marble; he cuts, as if with a hatchet, his

San Gimignano (xiii Century). Palace of the Podesta.

crowds of figures, glowing with life, rough and tense from brutal effort; and so he sets up the trenchant claim of the primitive Latin genius as opposed to the claims of the artists of the north. Italy does nor forget, because she remains Italy.

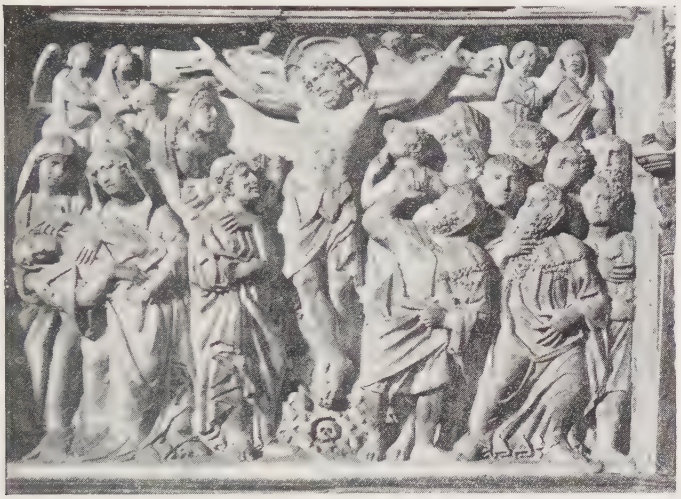
Too often people look upon the perpetuation of certain essential forms as the result of a traditional



Volterra (xiii to xv Century). Fortress.

desire transmitted by the schools, when in reality the forms are only an expression of the desires of a race and of the indications of its soil. In all the Mediterranean countries, where palm trees, pines, and yew trees detached their smooth trunks against a hard sky, the column which reappears on the front of the churches and which is used from the top to the bottom of the towers of Romanesque Italy was a natural expression that could not disappear. Antiquity and the new Italy are in accord in these lines of galleries bordered by arcades which spread their carved tracery over the round baptisteries, the bare façades of the

temples, and the square campaniles. The basilica has called to its aid the trees whose clearly marked foliage allows the transparence and the limpidity of the world to shine through their overhanging branches, and it is



Nicola Pisano. The Crucifixion, bas-relief. (*Baptistery of Pisa.*)

with their grace and pride that it covers the great Roman vessel.

The daily needs and the riches of Italy required this architecture. The image of her powerful cities and her villas, scattered over the sides of the hills among the cypresses, is imprinted on the hearts of those who cannot forget the educating power of her severe and melodious contours; it is in the hearts of all those who retain the clear memory of the white arcades and of the sheathings of black and white marble which from afar mingle the cathedrals with the blurred reds of the roofs. At the hour when the theocratic Romanesque was defining architectural

dogma in the north and west of Europe, Pisa and Lucca and many other cities of continental Italy were already passing beyond the towers and the temples to the popular expression that suited the Italians, as the

Treviso (1310). San Nicola.

French Commune was to pass on, a century later, to the popular expression that suited the French. The Italian Romanesque derives from the living spirit of the race with perfect ease. Italy will not have to rise up throughout its whole extent, as the north of France had to, in order to claim the right to assert its vision.

CIMABUE. Madonna with angels and Saint Francis of Assisi, fresco.
(*Lower Church, Assisi.*)

Catholicism here never ceased to employ external magnificence as an expression of political domination, which, if it does not leave freedom of thought to man, at least permits him complete freedom of sensation. The gallery with colonnades defines the church and the loggia, and the city house and the country house which the Tuscans and Lombards would still be building to-day, had they been left to their own devices. Along the streets paved with their broad flagstones, it is still the gallery with colonnades that shelters the crowd from showers and sun, and supports the pink or white façades whose rows of green shutters rise to the line of the roof. Under the pines shaped like parasols, it is the gallery that detaches its profiles against the straight-lined terraces of the Florentine villas. And at the gates of the cities, it protects the cool Campo Santo, paved with marble, where one walks over the dead.

II

In contrast with what occurred at the decline of the ancient civilizations, life reappeared in the north of the country. The south had not been so deeply plowed by the successive invasions. The Norman barons, in southern Italy, had had to defend themselves against a climate very different from their own and against a race that had been enervated by an effort reaching back farther into the past than did that of continental Italy. Moreover, they asked the protection of the Pope in repressing the conquered provinces. The whole of the feudal organization was used in breaking down the activity of the native population.

In the north, on the contrary, the cities profited by the struggle between the Pope and the Emperor in order to gain their autonomy and to fortify it by a system of alternative alliances with one or the other of

the two powers that were fighting for the domination of Italy. Guelphs and Ghibellines, Blacks and Whites, Pisa, Florence, Lucca, Siena, Parma, Modena, Bergamo, Mantua, Milan, Pavia, and Cremona, took now the one standard and now the other, to live their life

Giovanni Pisano. Nativity. (*Museum of Pisa.*)

of incessant warfare either under the cross of the Church or under the flag of the Empire. They had, indeed, to choose between death—at a moment when the passion for living was rising in floods—and a life which depended for its strength upon active vigilance, unwearying curiosity, and a continuous physical and moral effort. Hence, the energy of the Italian Republic, out of which the modern mind has evolved, whether we like to admit it or not.

If, amid all these rival cities which were ready to fall

upon one another on the morrow of their violent reconciliations, the rise of Florence was the most violent—to the point of absorbing Tuscany in two centuries, of playing a mighty role in the life of Europe, and of inscribing herself upon our memory with lines of steel—it was because she was at the crossing of the roads

Montepulciano (xiv Century). Cathedral.

that connect Rome with Germany and that connect the two seas which border the peninsula. The whole commercial, military, and moral life of the Italy of the Middle Ages traversed her. The grace and the vigor of the country that surrounds her were to make of her senses, tense and burnt by fever, the natural mold into which life was poured that it might be cast into well-characterized and clear images. We must remember that Tuscany, when it called itself Etruria, had already played a role in history analogous to this one. Many of the Etruscan painters have the bizarre

VOLTERRA (XIII Century). Palace of the Priori.

elegance which will characterize the art of the Tuscans two thousand years later.

Italy received the Gothic from France, at the dawn of the municipal life of her northern cities. She did not understand it. The forest of the cathedral was not made for her sky. In their silent shadows the immense naves extinguished the fever of her spirit. France is a country united by planes and rivers. Italy is a country divided by mountains. From the north to the south her cities of bronze menace one another from the tops of high hills separated by sudden ravines. The Italy of the Middle Ages could not have a religious architecture, because religious architecture, at that moment, received its grandeur from the social desires which created it and because, the soil being too cut up and the sky too clement to make men feel the necessity for aiding men, Italy had greater need for passion and intelligence, the instruments of the individual, than for instinct and faith, the instruments of the race. We must face the fact that, save for the Romanesque churches of the earliest period, with their pride, their warlike power, and their façade with its patina of gold, the Italian cathedrals are ugly. To be sure, they borrow a singular charm from the hard and lusty cities which mount tumultuously like an army rushing to the attack of the campanile that stands as straight as a mast in a hurricane. It is a bewitching, perverse charm and one from which we cannot tear ourselves without making an effort to dominate its superficial sensations. But when the Gothic appears, the cathedrals are overloaded with decoration and become mannered and grandiloquent. The Romans had made the same error in the old days when they emerged from their utilitarian architecture to erect temples to political parvenus. The Italians did not see that the use of ornament is to define the indispensable organs of the architectural

Siena (xiv Century). Sansedoni Palace.

body by making them more slender or lighter—heavier or broader, and that this must be done by accenting directly along the lines of their function. When ornament exceeds this role it becomes a source of ugliness. It masks the bone structure of the building whose characteristic projections are the only things that can justify it. There is no monumental architecture without social cohesion. Here the bones come through the skin, there the garments hang loosely. All the architecture of the Italian Renaissance, all the architecture of Europe since that period has been engulfed in a misunderstanding of this fundamental principle. And the misunderstood art of ornament of thirteenth-century France avenged Gothic architecture by invading a school which had no other reason for existence than that of combating its own magnificent precepts.

The municipal palaces were created for precise needs and defined the violent and free personality of the city; the private palaces defined the whole isolated and devouring personality of the lord who lived in them and who brought into the cities, where Italy concenters, the feudal world which had been driven from the countryside. And it is in these palaces that the Italian architect again finds himself, as the Roman architect found himself when his problem was to open roads, to build circuses, thermæ, and aqueducts. Here he is at home, and he affirms the fact. Immediately he becomes strong, sober, precise, and definitive. One receives the impression that the great pavement on which people walk and which is reddened by their blood on days of rebellion, has been set up straight toward the sky, perpendicular with the street. The fierce palaces follow one another, almost solid like blocks, without any other ornament than the brass fists that stick out of the walls as hitching posts for the horses. As the palaces start up from the soil their line is a little oblique, it

bends backward, like the spine of a bowman. Higher up it becomes vertical. At the top it leans forward, like the square shoulders whose mailed arms are about to send down lead and iron. Thus the whole façade is concave, impossible to scale. And two hermetical

Siena (xiv Century). Salimbeni Palace.

walls on each side of the street defy and menace each other, with the sinister melody of stone that has been set in place with a certainty of its practical function, even as a geometrical theorem is inscribed in the logical functioning of the brain. These crenelated cubes dominated by a square tower, these perfectly bare walls pierced by pairs of narrow windows between which stands a colonnette as stiff as an iron bar, and these profiles as hard as axes rise from the paved lanes of Siena, Perugia, Volterra, Florence, and Mantua and never seem more than half open. When the stand-

ard bearers unfurl the banner of the unions in the public square, the gates of bronze are closed against the insurrection of the people. Civil war continues. Let there be two different plumes on men's hoods, let a glance be given or a gesture made and the dagger leaps from its sheath. The tocsin sounds, men are ambushed at the cross streets, pursued under the vaults and murdered in the churches while the fortified houses pour down boiling oil and pitch upon the tumult. There is Italy, and nowhere else. When the illustrious Brunelleschi, right in the fifteenth century, built the Pitti Palace, piling two bare floors on almost unhewn blocks, when, after his journey to Rome, he broke with the disfigured architecture of the French to return to the positive art of his ancestors and abandoned the unreal lyrism of the religious architects of his country to set, on its eightfold ribbing of stone, the dome which rises above the roofs of Florence with a sweep so powerful and so firm, he was accomplishing a more radical revolution against the artists of the Italian Gothic than that which the men of the French Gothic had accomplished, three centuries earlier, against the monks who built in the Romanesque style. He rendered to the genius of his race the homage of recognizing that genius in himself.

III

And so at the hour when northern France was lifting up, amid the tremendous vibration of the bells, sonorous poems of stone and glass that hover and sway over the cities, Italy was defining herself in the violent, straight-lined palaces by the quality which, much later, will define her Renaissance. Already, here in the Middle Ages, she was affirming the rights of the individual. The Romanesque architects of Italy often

signed their works and all of Tuscany knew Nicola Pisano, the sculptor, when not one of the image makers of France had thought to tell his name. The Scaligers, erect on their war horses, were already stamping the dust. It was not possible for popular Christianity to take on the form in the Italian imagination which French sensibility had given it. Only few individuals could, without being consumed by it, embody in their lives the poetry of exalted sentiment which marked the character of the Christianity of the people. There is, indeed, a cathedral in Italy. But all the crowd could do was to cherish an ardent desire for it. It did not set its hand to the work. The body of the cathedral is Francis of Assisi. Its towers are Dante and Giotto.

Pisan Art (xiv to xv Century). Virgin, detail, wood. (*Louvre.*)

The foundation of the century is violence. The feudal Church, here, weighs down more heavily than in other places. The tiara and the miter are bought, when they are not taken by assault. Through the fear of hell the priest obtains obedience of the poor, among whom furious feeling obscures the sense of social duty, even as it does with the priest himself. Remember with what rage the tortures of the in-

ferno are painted on the walls of the Campo Santo of Pisa.

It was by a reaction that gentleness was born. It was as absolute as the preceding violence because, like the latter, it set fire to minds whose passion refused to stop short of full surrender to their insatiable instinct. Francis of Assisi was transported by love as other men were by the frenzy of killing. If he lived under the rule of the men whose corruption and violence had provoked his coming, it was because he felt in himself a gentleness, an invincible power, capable of cleansing and reviving the world. When he caused the human spirit to re-enter nature, from which primitive Christianity had torn it away, he restored to it the nurture of its dignity and strength. His pantheism protested against the Christian dualism which defines the discord between the soul and the flesh, and brutally cuts off access to the great harmonies. Dying, he repented of having practiced asceticism, of having "offended his brother the body." The profound and charming word! He was, in Italy, in the realm of sentiment, what Abelard had been in France and what Roger Bacon was to be in England in the domain of reason. The whole of pagan humanity, which he bound up with the spirit of Christ, revived in his love for universal life. And this love led him, where it had led the last thinkers of the pagan world, to the inner negation of property, which is to say—to freedom.

He did not preach moral sermons to the men of his time, to weary them without changing them. With a poetry so passionate that, while he spoke, he trembled, he laughed, he wept for joy, he told them that everything that was in him spoke of love for what is on the earth. He never ceased loving. He fell asleep and awoke under the trees. He called the beasts to him, he sang, warbled, and whistled with them, he begged alms for

GIOTTO. Saint Francis speaking to the birds, fresco.
(*Upper Church, Assisi.*)

them, and the beasts followed him. He asked counsel of the crickets and they gave it to him, and he did not

GIOTTO. The Virgin and Saint Anne, fresco.
(*Arena, Padua.*)

hesitate to follow it. He did not know theology, but he left this prayer:

Praised be my Lord God, with all his creatures, and especially our brother the sun, who brings us the day and who brings us the

GIOTTO. Jesus insulted by the Jews, fresco, detail.
(*Arena, Padua.*)

light; fair is he, and he shines with a very great splendor. O Lord, he signifies to us thee.

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, the which he has set clear and lovely in heaven.

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and

GIOTTO. The confession of Saint Francis, fresco.
(*Santa Croce, Florence.*)

clouds, calms and all weather, by which thou upholdest life in all creatures.

Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable to us, and humble and precious and clean.

Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright and pleasant, and very mighty and strong.

Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us, and bringest forth divers fruits and flowers of many colors, and grass.

(Translation of Maurice Francis Egan.)

When he died, the cities of Umbria fought around his coffin for the possession of his bones. Such is the

understanding of men. No matter. Even this again was passion. And he left in the piety of the multitudes and in the imagination of the strong a memory so resplendent that it illuminated Italy until the end

GIOTTO. Death of Saint Francis, detail, fresco.
(*Santa Croce, Florence.*)

of her evening. He restored to her the love of forms, and on that love she lived for four hundred years.

The greatest poet and the greatest painter of the Middle Ages drank from the well of his memory. At one bound the towers sprang up from the nave. The one rough and thickly growing, shot through by flames, full of the sound of the organ and of thunder—is upheld by iron ribbing. The other is calm, a ray rising from the world of the senses to follow in a straight course to the light of the spirit. Dante and Giotto. The two faces of the Middle Ages. The Inferno and

Paradise. Above all, the two faces of Italy, loving and violent, as she is charming and savage in her luminous bays and in her harsh rocks. It is the first of the great contrasts which we shall find up to the end of her heroic life, contrasts that are enveloped in the same harmony of passion and of intelligence; Masaccio and

GIOTTO. The descent from the Cross, detail, fresco. (*Arena, Padua.*)

Fra Angelico, Donatello and Gozzoli, Luca Signorelli and Ghirlandajo, Michael Angelo and Raphael. The same heaven harkens to the voice of the prophet and to the song of the shepherd as their sound rises to its sparkling spheres.

Giotto is not a primitive, any more than Dante. He is the conclusion of a long effort. If he revealed the language of forms to those who came a hundred years after him, it is slightly in the manner in which Phidias

GIOTTO. The descent from the Cross, fresco. (*Arena, Padua.*)

can still reveal it to those who love him enough to refuse to follow him. Guido, Cimabue, Duccio himself, the noble Sienese who recovered, through Byzantine tradition, the real soul of Greece and for the first time translated the drama of the Passion into terms of

School of Giotto. The massacre of the innocents, fresco. (*Lower Church, Assisi.*)

humanity, had not been able to force open the hieratic mold offered by the painters of Ravenna and the mosaicists sent by Constantinople. With Giotto everything invades the forms at once—movement, life, intelligence, and the great architectural calm. Because he was almost the first one to arrive, the means he used were limited, but with them he was able to translate a perfectly mature conception of the world and of life. His epoch permitted him to give only one expression to them, and he gave it, completely and con-

Perugia (xiv Century). Palazzo Pubblico.

sciously, with the freedom and the sobriety of the men who bear within them one of those decisive moments that humanity sometimes expends several centuries in attaining. He was one of those after whom dissociation and analysis must inevitably begin again. Renaissance Italy is separated from him by an abyss, and we shall have to wait until Raphael sketches and Rubens completes, for the modern spirit, the synthesis that Giotto made for the mediæval spirit.

He had that genius for the symbol which mediæval Christianity imposed on its poets as, upon those who cultivate the soil, Nature imposes the rhythm of her seasons. Since life for these poets symbolized the divine idea, they were unable to find their symbol save in the material of life which was passionately loved and passionately studied for what it contains and reveals. The symbol came to Giotto in the attitudes of men, in the humble movement of the beasts which grazed or hopped about at the level of the soil, in the prodigious blue carpet that day spread across space, and in the innumerable fires that night revealed there. Although he had within him only the potential forces accumulated by the unsatisfied needs of the men who had gone before him, although practically no one before his time had observed the life of forms, he could see at once that all our desires, and all our dreams, and all that is divine in us comes to us from our meeting with living forms, from the rough or charming places amid which we have lived, from the majestic bodies which we have seen bowed with weeping or raised again by hope, from the hands that supplicate, or that open, or that part the long hair over faces attentive, dolorous, or grave. His sense of all this was so pure that the image of it all, which he has made to live on the walls of Assisi and of Padua, passes directly into us like a process of life, without our having the time to perceive

that the thing before us is neither sculpture, in the exact sense of the word, since the profiles and the groups, though disposed sculpturally, are projected on a painted surface—nor is it painting, since the role of the values, of the reflections, and the passages is barely

SIMONE MARTINI. Two saints, detail, fresco. (*Lower Church, Assisi.*)

suspected. This rudimentary form is traversed by a lightning flash of the soul which instantly causes it to stand erect.

In Italy he was, in himself, the incarnation of the Christianity of the people which, in that period, covered with its thick tangled growth the field of sen-

sibility of the French crowds. Like them, he could easily feel the meaning for everyone of the birth, the life, and the death of the Man whom the poor had caused to be deified that they might the better recognize themselves in Him; and he told the story in that language both of the intellect and the heart which his race and his sky alone could dictate to him. In the ingenuousness of his heart he found the loftiest drama of man. And as he saw only the essential direction of the gestures of those who enacted that drama, he made them more direct, more exact, and more true in order to bring its scenes before men who, after his time, would need only to close their eyes to feel the drama living within them.

It comes over us gently, in calm and incessant waves. Like a leaf that has fallen on the great waters of a river, we follow the movement of irresistible gentleness which is within men and women and which causes them to prostrate themselves around the dead hero that is in their hands as they support the bloodless head and the broken feet and arms; it spreads like a steady light over earth and heaven which become tranquil round about Him. No one before Giotto, not even those who had turned to woman to speak their farewell through her, no one had ever quite grasped her role in the inner life of humanity, no one had ever seen her thus forever surrounded by passion, ceaselessly torn by maternity and by love, and crucified at all times. Never had anyone said that she, unlike the living gods that we nail to the cross, has not the consolation of pride, that she allows herself to be tortured, and yet does not lose faith in her executioners, who are her sons and the fathers of her sons, and that she asks of them no other recompense than the right to suffer for them. The world had not yet observed all that there is in a face where the eyes are hollow under the agonized lines

SIMONE MARTINI. Calvary, detail. *(Spanish Chapel, Florence.)*

of the brow, in a head that rests on two knotted hands, or in the gesture of two outstretched arms. This work is the greatest dramatic poem in the history of painting. It is not to be described, it is not to be explained, it is not to be evoked, it must be lived through. One must have seen, at Assisi, how those burning harmonies cause the shadows to tremble, one must have seen the heaps of murdered children, the mothers who die or supplicate or gaze at the little limp body across their knees, one must have seen the soldiers who look like butchers. And in Florence, one must have seen the friends of Francis who bow over his death under the wave of sorrow of the last moments. At Padua, one must have seen the kneeling women, those who open their arms and those whose clasped hands make a cradle for the divine corpse, and the Christ among the hideous men who insult Him, and the men who suffer and the ones who pray and the ones who love. And when one has seen this, it is like a strong and gentle wine that one bears away within him forever.

Giotto had picked up the echo of French art in the illuminations in the books, and had certainly met, in Italy, masons and image makers from the banks of the Seine. The son of the old sculptor of Pisa, Giovanni, who came but a short time before him, had touched him by his Nativities, full of animation and tenderness, where one sees the enchantment of the actors in the scene as they hear the cry of the child, as they see the beasts cropping the grass, and as they surprise life at its dawn with the charmed mother who bends over the cradle. Giovanni had left him speechless with his scenes of murder, his crucifixions, and his massacres of the innocents, dramas so burning and so full of movement that they seemed to fill the stone with their passion and to hurl it in gusts of flame before the spectator. He had roused him to enthusiasm by the surety

of his language, as powerful and flexible as a long sword that one bends double and that flashes lightning as it springs back. Through the Sienese painters, he had got back to Ravenna, where, before the splendor of the polychrome of the shining mosaics, he had surmised, beyond Byzantium, the calm of the Panathenaic processions that still took their course around the Parthenon. He had seen the architecture of antiquity at Rome, at Naples, and at Assisi, where Cavallini, the painter, brought to him the tradition of the Roman mosaicists. Standing before the frescoes of Cimabue, that were still fresh, with their blue and the gold that reddened in the glow of the torches, he had worked in the darkness of the lower church where all the mystic skies have accumulated in the plaster their azure, their twilights, and the stars of their nights. The line of the mountains had called to him everywhere, likewise the bays and men. Behold those figures that stand out, pure and with a single movement, those harps and those violins that are played upon, those palms that are waved, those

Taddeo Gaddi. The Annunciation. (*Santa Croce, Florence.*)

banners that are bowed, and those noble groups around the beds where there is a death or a birth. Something is quivering there that the Greeks did not know, a sadness in the mouths, a gentleness in the eyes, the confidence that man for a moment had in man and in the hope that suffering might cease. Something shines there that the Middle Ages of the Occident no longer knew, a re-echoing of forms in other forms, a harmony of movements that answer one another, a line which by its rhythmic undulation connects the torsos which bend over with others that are prostrate and still others that stand erect.

I cannot, for my part, imagine a man more intelligent than Giotto. And I am sure that this intelligence is nothing else than the progressive and logical refining of the most direct thought and of the most unstudied emotion. When he had seen how his friend died, and had seen his wife giving birth, or his child suffering, he knew the spontaneous organization among the attitudes of those who weep or those who act in and about the drama, all of them having the drama itself as the sole center of attraction. Without effort, as it seems, and to express this drama and the circumstances of it directly and naturally, the living masses obey the secret laws that have presided over the harmony of the groups since the beginning of time. It is because each one of the beings who takes part therein acts according to the character of his sentiment which he contributes to the more general character of the ensemble—the artistic, or if you will, metaphysical character that reproduces the mysterious eurhythmy of the worlds with an instinctive, musical, and yet close fidelity. Beside the old Florentine master, Raphael seems to have perceived the mere externals of action, Michael Angelo gives the impression of a desperate effort toward that perfect equilibrium which, in Giotto, is an essen-

The Church Militant, fresco, detail. (*Santa Maria Novella, Florence.*)

tial function; Rubens seems to force into theatrical attitudes the inner movement that arranges and distributes; and Rembrandt, at times, seems to be seeking effects. The order that all of them feverishly pursue in the sudden intuitions, the tempests, the revolts, or

ORCAGNA. Paradise, detail, fresco. (*Santa Maria Novella, Florence.*)

the sustained tension of the spirit enters into Giotto with the emotion itself, and he acquires an architectural and plastic character through the harmonious meeting of the mind and the heart. And, considered in this way, the "composition" of Giotto is perhaps the greatest miracle in the history of painting. I say "miracle," because a miracle is the most spontaneous realization in action of the desire that is most inaccessible in the mind. These clasped hands, these fingers that clutch at the breast, these bodies kneeling or

ANDREA DA FIRENZE (?). The sick imploring Saint Dominic, fresco. (*Spanish Chapel, Florence.*)

arising or half-bowed or erect, this progressive building up in steps of human forms, all the outer attributes of the despair, of the supplication, of the adoration, and of the prayer that make up this pathetic work enter like a flood into the unity of thought to demonstrate the well-defined accord of our moral requirements with our æsthetic needs. A powerful and contagious melody runs through and sways all the violent actions. . . . This poet of sorrow possessed the joy that belongs to the epochs of life in which everything reaches a climax and unites and agrees in all minds, so that it may one day comfort those who will seek the traces of these minds, whatever the faith and the life of the seekers, whatever the cause of their suffering and the form of their hope. It was not Giotto who brought about the unity of his work: it was the unity of the time that created him. And Unity, which is a hymn, raises us above tears. Giotto does not weep over the Christ or over woman, nor do we, as we look at his work. With Giotto we are in the presence of an unspeakable gentleness, an unspeakable hope. He understands, he bends over, he reaches out a strong hand, he lifts up the man who has fallen, and, to sustain him and carry him along, he intones a magnificent chant; his great severe line undulates, rises, descends and reascends, like a voice.

Profoundly Italian though his idealistic, dramatic, and decorative genius, and containing, although he epitomized only a single moment of Italy, the whole Italy that was to come, even fallen Italy, the universal quality of humanity that Giotto possessed brings him into communion with all the heroes of painting, through the piety with which he welcomed life, through the passionate feeling he had for the burdens that it laid upon him, and through the divine desire that caused him to transfigure the world and support the celestial blue of the half-opened paradise on the grave human

accents of the reds, the greens, and the blacks. . . . His hope never rose higher than his courage as a man. On the day when he re-assembled, around the crucified Jesus, angels half emerging from heaven on their wings

Pisa (xiv Century). The triumph of death, fresco. (*Campo Santo.*)

made up of rays of light, he recovered the supreme symbol, that Æschylus had imagined, to fortify our courage when he saw in flight around Prometheus the swarm of the Oceanides.

IV

In itself, then, this work is a social monument wherein radiant painting groups sculptural volumes in an architectural rhythm. When the man had disappeared, it crumbled rapidly. Those who came after him could

do no more than gather up the debris for the building of isolated edifices which, in the anarchy of the century, were only provisional sanctuaries, frail and exposed to

Siena (xiv Century). Via Golluzza.

all storms. The disquieted and disunited soul of Italy could no longer find in them more than a shadow of the heroic certitude wherein the great spirits of the Middle Ages had imagined her hope. It was after Giotto that the veritable primitives appeared, but

primitives who had lost the great impulse—the end of an epoch. That dull dawn that illumined from within the great serious faces of the virgins of Cimabue, with their great eyes to whose depths we can never look, any more than we can those of the figures painted on the sarcophagi of Egypt, on the cupolas of Constanti-

Duccio. Christ in the Garden. (*Opera del Duomo, Siena.*)

nople, and on the walls of Pompeii, that nascent force that was beginning to sculpture the flat skulls of the Byzantine idols, to lift up, in confused animation, the choir of the saved, to the accompanying tones of the harps of heaven, all of that obscure flame of life which, in the flash of the mind that we call Giotto, suddenly revealed man to himself, sank to earth together at the same time, and its light diminished till nothing was left but a few hesitating gleams that went out in smoke. As the Italian artists could not re-create the magnificent equilibrium of soul which had covered the walls of Assisi and Padua with those austere lines through

which the order of the universe inscribed itself for a moment, and as they saw only two divine works behind them, they sought their refuge in the more despairing one, the only one, indeed, that gave them the liberty to speak as they pleased. Giotto

Duccio. The miraculous draught of fishes.
(*Opera del Duomo, Siena.*)

being inaccessible to them, the Dantesque cycle opens at the moment when the plague in Tuscany justified the visions of the poet. In Florence, Orcagna, the man of severe imagination, the painter who shows us visages ennobled by meditation or contracted by grief, saw all about him the gathering of crowds who raised their eyes to heaven and who bowed their great forms in prayer. Taddeo Gaddi, in the gentleness of his despair, nailed the Christ on all the walls. The Spanish chapel was covered with painting over whose

fervency passed a wind of terror, where the cripple and the sick man crept out of their hovels to stretch forth their hands. At Pisa, abandoned to the terrible Dominicans in its political decadence, it was now only the walls of the cemetery that were decorated, and then with rotting corpses, with worms, with demons and

PIETRO LORENZETTI. The descent from the Cross, fresco. (*Lower Church, Assisi.*)

tortures—we witness a veritable furor of remorse. . . . Siena obstinately allowed herself to sink deeper and deeper into a sickly resolve to die without a struggle.

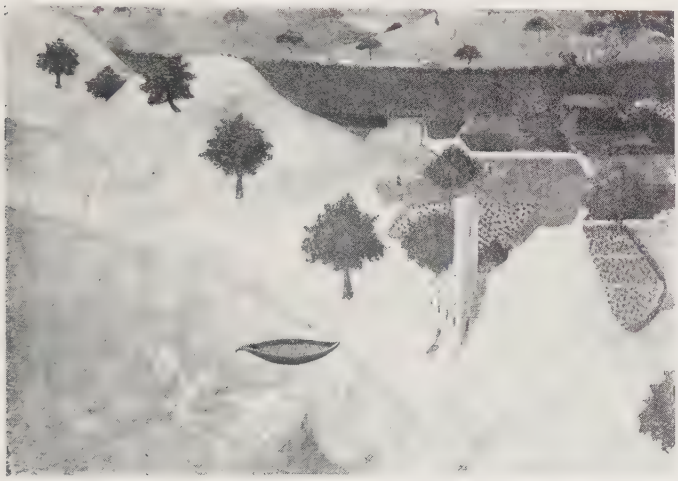
Of all the Italian cities she had always been the most violent, the one that had known the greatest suffering in civil war and had been most frequently devastated by the military conflicts of the north and south, between which she was caught. She retained the hardness of the age of iron in Italy. Her artists

saw Giotto, but touched him no deeper than his skin, and allowed him to penetrate no deeper than theirs. Duccio played the same role among the painters of Siena as Giotto did among the Florentines. They were of the same age, but doubtless they knew little of each other. In any case, far more than Giotto, he

Ambrogio Lorenzetti. The Pope and the Franciscans, fresco, detail. (*San Francesco, Siena.*)

remains engulfed in the Byzantium which, be it said, he animates with an expressiveness of great power and charm. He has, to the highest degree, the gift of giving life and movement to his crowds. They are active and busy, without great actions, but with a movement in the ensemble that clearly reveals the meaning of the scene at our first glance. He has but the slightest intuition of that sublime "composition" which, with the great Florentine, is no other than a

perfect balance between the moral element and the descriptive element. But he goes straight to his goal of relating the emotion aroused in him by the life and death of the Lord, and he expresses his ideas in living forms; his speech is marked by nobility, tenderness, verve, and archness, even when he is impassioned, and



Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Landscape, fresco. (*Academy, Siena.*)

in these qualities he has scarcely a superior throughout the whole of Italian painting, save Giotto himself. His immediate successors, Barna, for example, make a melodramatic travesty, though an ardent and highly colored one, of this power for passion which would suffice to define, outside of the genius of Giotto, the genius of Italy itself. All her heroes have possessed this dramatic soul, and for five centuries all her false artists have shamelessly used it to calumniate, before the eyes of men, the ideal that she has poured forth so generously. Barna and Spinello Aretino disfigure the

death struggle of the Middle Ages of the Latin world, as the Bolognese school was later on to disfigure the death struggle of the Latin Renaissance by turning into theatrical declamation the spiritual realities that had been wrested from the unknown by Masaccio, Da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Raphael, and Titian.

And yet in this retrograde city which, amid the disorder and the anxiety of all minds, was possessed by the desire to protect its gods under its armor, the slow fading of the last flower of the Gothic had a penetrating perfume. We meet with something here that has a certain resemblance to the end of French architecture. . . . It is like the dying poetry of the stained glass with which a sick people irritates its fever, after the living poetry that had resounded in stone and bronze with the voices of strong men. Siena goes to her death in the burning shadow of the marble cathedral whose black and white campanile mounts from the rock under the pitiless sky. She sinks in the mystic fervor of the pure blues and the golds brought to her painters by the Byzantine mosaicists. Simone Martini withdraws his gaze from the military cavalcades and the high crenelated towers that arise and threaten one another over the wave of the roofs, only that he may listen the better to the vibrating of the celestial harps in the space that no eye can penetrate, but from which comes the wind that sways the lilies he paints. With him all the walls of the palaces and the churches tremble with profound voices, as if the pale virgins who cover them from top to bottom and who, amid the gold and the palms, raising the great oblique eyes in their long pure faces, were together making audible, in the poignant accents of chanted suffering and gentleness, the noble protest of the consoling legends against the noble effort of the time. In the heart of the fifteenth century, when round them a renewed ideal is tor-

menting Tuscany, Bartolo di Fredi, Sano di Pietro, and Lorenzo di Pietro are still obstinately listening to distant voices which for the other Italians are lost in silence. Only Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the powerful decorator whose frescoes sing, vibrate, weep, and become calm again and swell like the tone of the choir

Sienese School (end of xiv Century). Crucifixion, fresco, detail. (*Subiaco.*)

of violoncellos, only Ambrogio has heard the confused murmur that rises from the streets and the countryside and from the little hills covered with vineyards and pine trees —the murmur that announces a new awakening; and at the same time his brother Pietro imprints a new unity upon the plastic splendor that he discovers in the drama of the Cross. A marvelous animation peoples his august landscapes, where the labors of the husbandmen and scenes of war cover the serried hills

and cut into the hollow valleys. It is a vast poem, epic and intimate, teeming with imagination, as if a world foreseen were fermenting in the furrows of the plow, in the seed, and in harvests. And then, more profoundly than any one of the Florentines of his time, Ambrogio scrutinizes and characterizes faces. His

Sano di Pietro or Sassetta.
Charity, Poverty, and Humility.
(*Chantilly.*)

great effigies, as firm and pure as the portraits of the Chinese, seem graven in the wall, seem outlined and cemented with stone. Slowly and powerfully their eyes awaken and look out from the hard faces, they do not move, but are terrible in their severity, their concentration, and their silence. Their drawing is so concise and so completely a result of the will of the artist, the expressive lines and curves are so closely

linked that we already behold a first and almost complete realization of the desire to determine by geometrical means the least abstract characteristics of life when it moves us most; and later on, it will be in an art conceived in this manner that we shall find the meeting place of the heroes of the following century, Paolo Uccello, Andrea del Castagno, Piero della Francesca, Luca Signorelli. But even so, Ambrogio, almost as truly as his brother Pietro, remains a man of the Middle Ages in the strength of his moral philosophy—already quite strained, it is true, and too voluntary, through his uncompromising and precise sense of the just and the unjust expressed in the beautiful dark harmonies, red and black, in which there resounds, with a painful sharpness, the supreme appeal of the past. Siena dies of her desire to maintain, in the face of new needs, the worn-out principle that had caused her to live. While she is shutting herself up in her narrow independence, Florence absorbs Tuscany, and subjects it to her spirit.

SANCHI (III Century B.C.). Detail of a door of the Stupa.

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AFRICA. Dance mask (Gaboon). (*Guillaume Collection.*)

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